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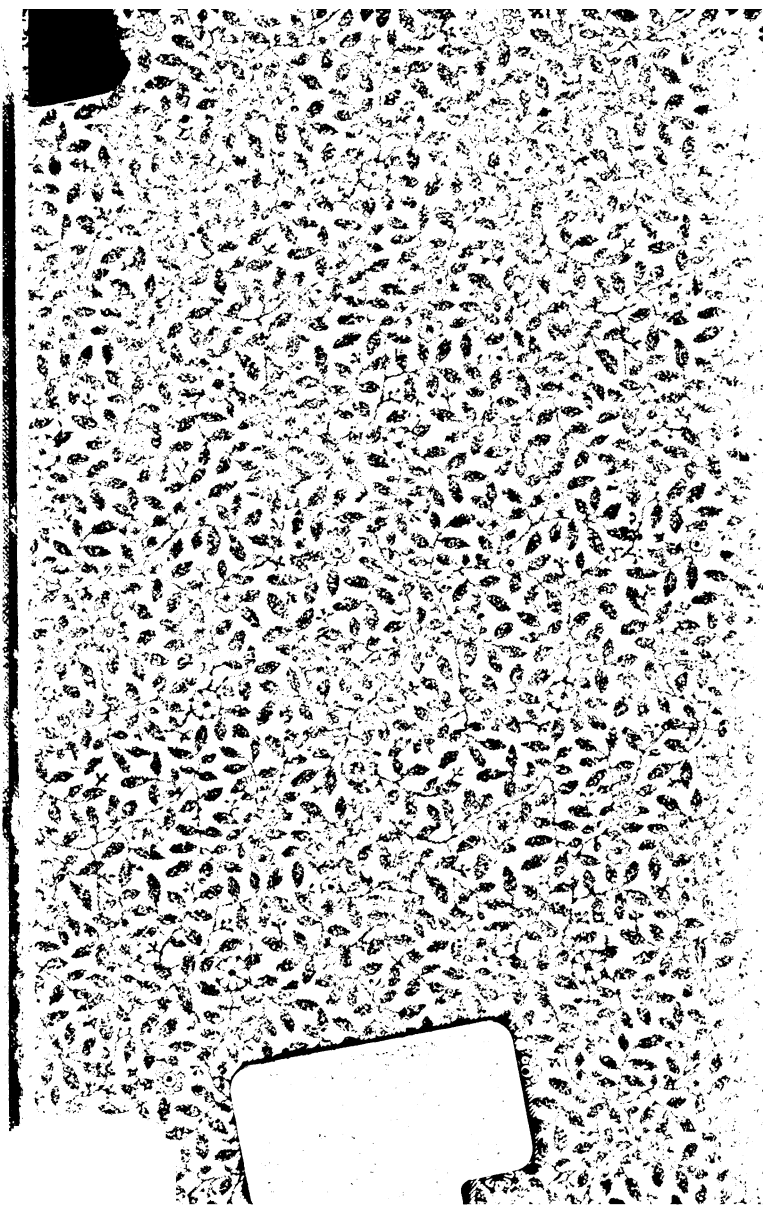
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MARY FORESHADOWED;

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON
THE TYPES AND FIGURES
OF
OUR BLESSED LADY
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THE saints and pious writers are unanimous in their opinion that the Blessed Virgin Mary was in ancient times announced by various prophecies, and foreshadowed by many symbols. The reason, no doubt, must be sought in Mary's excellence and dignity. She was not only the purest of creatures, but moreover she was destined to be associated in a singular manner in the great work of our Redemption. When, therefore, the coming of the Messiah is foretold and described, it is but natural that the Mother of the Redeemer should be, if not always as clearly depicted as in Genesis and

Isaias, at least obscurely announced, and represented, or insinuated, by figures and comparisons.

These various types and symbols are not without utility. They are, as it were, what pictures are to the uneducated who cannot read. What others see in letters, they behold in the production of the artist's pencil. They obtain at a glance at least a superficial and limited knowledge of that which others learn more perfectly by studying the letters. Now, as regards the great works of God, we cannot boast of much learning; but if we wish to become acquainted with them, we must begin by acknowledging our ignorance. If, then, we desire to know something concerning the Mother of God, let us look attentively at the pictures given of her in Holy Scripture. And if we study them well, we shall not fail to find them both pleasing and instructive.

The advantages of comparisons and parables are also seen from the fact that our Blessed Saviour has made a frequent use of them in instructing the people. 'It is customary,' remarks St. Jerome, 'among the Syrians, and especially those of Palestine, to add parables to their discourses, in order that what the hearers could not keep in their mind by a

mere enunciation, they might be better able to remember by means of a similitude.'

If comparisons and parables are thus generally useful, we may say that in a certain sense they are necessary when we wish to study an object which is entirely beyond our reach and comprehension. Let us take, for instance, the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist. God prepares His people for it by the figures and symbols of the Old Law, such as the Paschal Lamb, the Manna, the Ark of the Covenant, the Loaves of Proposition. Our dear Saviour gives them additional similitudes. He changes water into wine; He multiplies the loaves. He also reminds them of the figures of old; He speaks of the Manna; and describes Himself as the Living Bread come down from heaven.

Under God there is not a more sublime object than Mary, and consequently, we may say, no object further beyond the reach of our very limited intellect. We are so imperfect, that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for us to compass even those perfections of which a creature is capable. Imagine ever so much kindness, mercy, compassion, meekness, love, and above all, purity and innocence, and you will yet fall far, immensely far, short of

obtaining an adequate idea of Mary's qualities. Still, the more we consider them in other creatures by way of comparison, the more we shall advance, or rather the less we shall be deficient, in the knowledge of the transcendent perfections of the Mother of God.

Another consequence of this exercise will be to increase our devotion towards the Blessed Virgin. For our heart is naturally inclined to love what is good and kind. Our love of Mary, then, will naturally increase with our knowledge. All Christians love and honour our Blessed Lady, as they are bound to do. But why is their devotion so cold? And why do they derive so little fruit therefrom? It is because they know little of Mary, and do not endeavour to learn more. Perhaps they do not know how to enter upon the subject. But, assuredly, in the types and figures of the Mother of God we have an easy and pleasing means of making ourselves better acquainted with her.

We have then before us a great scope, and abundant matter; for the symbols of our Blessed Lady are very numerous. On the other hand, those things which are said literally of the Blessed Virgin in Holy Scripture

are but few. And on this subject St. Thomas of Villanova speaks as follows :

‘ I have been thinking and considering for a long time why the Evangelists, who write so much concerning St. John the Baptist and the Apostles, say so little of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who surpasses them all by her life and her dignity. Why did they not relate how she was conceived, born, educated ; her good works, and virtues ; how she conversed with her Son during His life, and how she lived with the Apostles after His ascension ? Surely these were all great and memorable things, and might have been read with much devotion by the faithful.

‘ All I can say is, that it has thus pleased the Holy Ghost, for, as we read in the Psalms, all the glory of the Blessed Virgin was within, and it is easier to imagine than to describe it. The Holy Spirit has not given an account of her in words, but He has left it to you to depict her in your mind ; in order that you may understand that no grace, no perfection, no glory, of which a mere creature is capable, was wanting in her ; but that she exceeds all we can imagine.’

St. Bonaventure seems, as it were, to reply

the leaves of the writings of the Fathers and Saints ; we must listen to the language of the Church in her Offices of the Blessed Virgin ; and, guided by these shining lights, we shall advance in the knowledge of Mary's prerogatives and perfections.

‘ O Mary, who hast been foreshadowed and promised to the patriarchs and prophets, show thyself to us ! Show thyself as a Mother ! *Monstra te esse Matrem !* O thou who wast chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of Jesus, be a Mother unto us ; and may He through thee receive our prayers, Who for us vouchsafed to be thy Son !’



I.

EVE.

‘Vocavit Adam nomen uxoris suæ Heva: eo quod mater esset cunctorum viventium.’—GENES. iii. 20.

‘Adam called the name of this wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.’



THE first type of the Blessed Virgin which we meet in Holy Scripture is Eve. How often do we think of her! How often do we go back in spirit to those primitive times, when the human race was first established upon earth! Adam was the first man, our common father according to nature. But, as the Apostle says: ‘The first man was of the earth, earthly; the second man from heaven, heavenly’ (1 Cor. xv. 47). The second, the heavenly man, the perfect

man, is Christ Jesus. He is styled 'the second Adam.' Adam is a type of our Blessed Redeemer, a very imperfect type, however, as we see from the comparison drawn by the Apostle: 'By a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive' (1 Cor. xv. 22).

As the first man was a type of Christ, the second Adam, so we find in the first woman a type of Mary, who is called the new, or second Eve. 'Mary,' says Richard Victorinus, 'is the new Eve, from whom the second Adam was born.' And Henry Suso calls her 'the second and blessed Eve.' The terms 'woman' and 'mother' can be applied to none in a fuller sense than to Eve and to Mary.

We call Eve a type of the Mother of God, in the first place, because as Eve was made by the hands of God Himself, so Mary was also in a special manner the work of the hand of God. Who made her His tabernacle and His dwelling-place. 'Amongst all the works of the Great Creator,' says Idiota (Raymundus Jordanus), 'after the wonderful operation whereby the Son of the Eternal Father was united to our nature, thou, O Blessed Virgin, wast the special work of God, Who made thee in order that

what had become deformed of His first production might be reformed through thee.' And St. Augustine, speaking against the Manichees, puts these words in the mouth of Christ: 'I have made the Mother from whom I was to be born. I have prepared and cleansed the way of My coming. She whom thou despisest, O Manichee, is my Mother, but yet she was formed by My hand.'

God had, as it were, to put His hand to the work anew in Mary's regard, because He made her different from the rest of mankind. He suspended in her favour the ordinary rule, the general decree, by which the whole human race is involved in a common doom. Moreover, as He destined her to be the Mother of His beloved Son, and consequently the Queen of heaven and earth, in dignity surpassing all creatures, He made her the masterpiece of creation, and heaped upon her all the blessings and graces of which a creature is capable.

This consideration leads us to the second point of similitude between Eve and Mary namely, that both were created in innocence and holiness. We say similitude, or resemblance, not sameness. Both, it is true, were created in innocence inviolate; that is, in absolute holiness, without blemish. But Mary's

innocence was not only inviolate, it was inviolable—it could not be tarnished. Oh, how happy was Eve before she knew what sin was! But she ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good evil, and thus she lost her original innocence. Mary was never estranged from God; Mary never knew what sin is, for the One that is mighty did great things in her. ‘Thou art all fair, O Mary! Thou art all pure, all holy, all innocent! And there is not a spot in thee!’

The third similitude between Eve and Mary results from the words of Holy Scripture: ‘I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head.’ Three creatures were present before God when He pronounced the sentence: Adam, Eve, and the serpent or the devil. For, as Cornelius a Lapide remarks, although the evil spirit had quitted the serpent after the temptation, and it was now creeping about in the garden, it had, at God’s command, to appear before Him, together with our first parents. It is, then, directly to these three, and of these three, that God speaks in delivering the sentence. But if we take the woman to mean Eve, and Eve only, how, we may ask, did she crush the serpent’s head? Eve, answers the

fore-mentioned author, crushed the devil by doing penance for her sin. But, he continues, we must rather by the woman understand Mary, as her seed is Jesus Christ. The Blessed Virgin truly crushed the serpent, since she always fully and gloriously triumphed over the devil and sin.

In the opinion of St. Epiphanius, the enmities here mentioned are referred to Eve figuratively only, because the words of the text are not verified in her in the fulness of their meaning. A consideration of what is meant by the seed of the woman will make this clear. Suppose the text speaks of Eve only, and of her seed. All mankind are the seed, or the children of Eve. But where is the enmity between all the children of men and the devil? Truly the devil hates us. But, alas! there are many, even among Christians, that court his friendship! And the effects of this pernicious friendship will for many endure eternally in the avenging flames. It is not, then, between all mankind and the devil that enmities exist; it is not by all mankind that the serpent is crushed. But in Jesus and Mary the prophetic text has found its complete fulfilment. In Eve, after her conversion, the dire effects of sin remained,

and thus she crushed the infernal enemy only to some extent by her penance. Mary completely crushed the serpent's head by her innocence. Her triumph over the devil was perfect, since there was never in her even the shadow of sin.

Mary was prefigured by Eve, in the fourth place, because she has a much better claim than Eve to the title of 'Mother of the living.' When Adam had, at Eve's suggestion, sullied the robe of his innocence, and, having been found guilty before God, had drawn upon his whole posterity the sentence of death: 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return,' then, writes Moses, 'Adam called the name of his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.' Who is not filled with astonishment at these words? Through Eve death comes into the world; and she, who is the cause of death, receives the name of 'Life,'* and 'Mother of the living!'

St. Epiphanius explains this apparent contradiction in the following manner. 'Adam,' he says, 'spoke at that moment in mysterious and prophetic terms. He mentioned indeed the name of Eve, but Mary was hereby fore-

* Heva, Vivens or Vivificans. The Septuagint translate it by Ζωή, 'life.'

shadowed. For as Eve is, in reality, the mother of the dead, so Mary is truly the mother of the living.'

Consider the Blessed Virgin in this light, and you will see that she has a much greater claim to the title of 'Mother of the human race' than our first mother Eve. For what is life, properly speaking? It is to be animated with a Divine principle. '*In Ipso vita erat*' — 'In Him (in Jesus) was life' (St. John i.). And Jesus says: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (St. John xiv.). The Word Incarnate is for us the only source of this true life, the life of grace, which is so far superior to our natural life, that without it life is eternal death. The Son of God has taken our nature in order to make us partakers of His Divine life; and to bring about this ineffable union, He has used Mary as an instrument; for He was 'conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.'

The Blessed Virgin has brought us forth to a new life, the life of grace, and therefore we properly call her 'our Mother,' and 'the Mother of the living.' The Church also calls her 'our Life,' in the *Salve Regina*: 'Hail, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope!' And as in olden times the daughter of Pharaoh adopted

Moses on the banks of the Nile, so Mary adopted all the Faithful in a special manner for her children at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus entrusted them to her care, saying: 'Woman, behold thy son!' After that, He saith to the disciple: 'Behold thy mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own. The Gospel does not say, 'John took her,' but 'the disciple took her,' a name common to all the followers of our Divine Redeemer.

St. Bernardine of Siena, explaining these words, says: 'By John we understand all the elect, of which the Blessed Virgin became the Mother.' Devotion to Mary, the Mother of the living, is looked upon as a sign of predestination, and election to eternal life. St. Bonaventure completes these remarks, saying that, as Mary is the Mother of the elect here, so she is the Mother of all the saints in heaven, and the fulness of their joy after God.

Oh, how far inferior is the figure to the reality! From Eve we receive death, from Mary immortality. The one offers us the fruit of death, the other the fruit of life. Oh, what an advantage it is for us to have Mary for Mother! Let us, then, turn ourselves with confidence to her, saying:

'O second and Blessed Eve, O Immaculate Virgin Mother, free us from all woe ! Change Eve's curse into a blessing, her mourning into joy, her sin into grace, her death into eternal life !'



II.

PARADISE.

'Plantaverat autem Dominus Deus paradysum voluptatis a principio: in quo posuit hominem.'
—GENES. ii. 8.

'The Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein He placed man.'

PARADISE was a beautiful garden, teeming with delights, planted by God Himself, and adorned with every produce of nature that was pleasing to the taste and charming to the eye. In the midst of this delightful garden grew a wonderful tree, called the tree of life. This lovely abode, in which God placed man holy and innocent, was watered by a limpid stream, which from thence was divided into four heads (Genes. ii.).

This description of the primitive garden of

pleasure may be applied to the spiritual paradise of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary; 'a paradise far more blessed than Eden, where the plants of virtue grew in perfect beauty; in its midst was the tree of life, and through it we return to our former life (the life of grace), turning our back to the flaming sword.'*

In the eyes of the Almighty, Mary was truly a place of delight, on account of the abundance of her graces and virtues. The graces which the Mother of God received surpassed those of all other creatures; for as St. Bernardine of Siena very well remarks, when God chooses a person to fill a sublime position, He also grants that person the graces necessary and suitable to the office. Now, since there is no dignity on earth so exalted as that of the Mother of Jesus, she must have been blessed by God above all other creatures. The Angel salutes her 'full of grace,' and calls her 'blessed amongst women.' The Blessed Virgin, as St. Bonaventure says, was indeed a delightful paradise of God, on account of the graces with which her heart was filled. To her we may apply the words of Ecclesiasticus :

* St. John Damascene, Orat. 4, De Nativitate B.V.M.

‘Grace is like a paradise in blessings,’—that is, producing fruits of every virtue. Concerning these blessings of grace and virtue the Apostle writes to the Ephesians: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings!’ If grace makes the human heart delightful as a paradise of God in the blessings of virtue, what a pleasing paradise must Mary have been, since she was blessed above all others !*

As the terrestrial paradise was the first home of man on earth, so the Blessed Virgin, the spiritual paradise, became the abode of God-made man. ‘The Lord had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning, wherein He placed man.’ The mystical paradise in which the Man Christ Jesus dwelt, was also planted from the beginning, that is in the mind of the Most High, for the one great purpose of being a fit habitation for the Son of God. It was therefore that she was predestined from all ages, that she was exempt from all sin, and adorned with the most unique prerogatives. Speaking on this subject, a pious author† properly remarks: ‘As Moses

* *Speculum B.M.V.*, Lect. xiv.

† G. Reismyler, S.T.D., *Corona Stellarum Duodecim.*

describes the terrestrial paradise at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, so St. Matthew draws, as it were, the picture of a new paradise, beginning his Gospel with the words: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.' If God prepared with so much care the terrestrial paradise which He destined to be the habitation of man, and made it abound in delights, with how much more care must He have prepared the mystical paradise of His beloved Son! Very appropriately, therefore, the Church sings in our Lady's Office: 'Thou art become beautiful and sweet in thy delights, O Holy Mother of God!'

The God-Man was prefigured by the tree of life, which stood in the midst of paradise. Hence St. Proclus describes Mary as 'the ever blooming and unfading paradise, in which was planted the tree of life, that yields to all the fruit of immortality.' And Hymnographus says that she is 'A new paradise, containing the tree of life, whose fruit gives a new Life to those who had incurred death by eating of the forbidden fruit.' The fruit of the Blessed Virgin Mary is Jesus Christ, the true Life, and the Source of life, Who feeds our soul with His holy grace. This fruit of life becomes in a special manner the food of our soul in Holy

Communion. God planted the tree of life in the terrestrial paradise, in order that, by partaking of its fruit, man might be preserved from death. By his sin, man lost this great advantage. God sent him out of paradise, 'lest perhaps he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and live for ever.' The use of this preservative against temporal death is now denied us. But our Blessed Saviour has given us a far more precious fruit, which will preserve us from eternal death. The Holy Eucharist is a remedy against sin, and its worthy reception gives us a special claim to the glorious resurrection, according to Christ's promise: 'He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day' (St. John vi.).

Now, if the tree of life grew in paradise, and if paradise was a figure of Mary, the Mother of God, how praiseworthy and how advantageous must be the pious practice of having recourse to our Blessed Lady, when we desire to approach the tree of life, Jesus Christ! 'Through thee,' says St. Bernard, 'we have access to thy Son, for thou has found grace, O Mother of life, Mother of salvation: so that He may receive us through thee, Who through thee was given to us.'

Before Holy Mass, the priests are accustomed to pray to the Blessed Virgin, asking her that, as she assisted at the Sacrifice which was offered on Calvary, so she would also deign to assist all the ministers of her Divine Son, in order that they may worthily offer the Holy Sacrifice to God's Infinite Majesty. The faithful would do well to imitate this, when they prepare to partake of the fruit of life in Holy Communion. They should then have recourse to Mary, and implore her to supply their lack of adequate preparation and proper dispositions, by the abundance of her merits.

Mary is also compared to paradise, because as it was watered by a river which went out of the place of pleasure, and was from thence divided into four heads, so the Blessed Virgin is, as Richard Victorinus says, 'a paradise from which flows a stream of grace, which spreads itself over the world, and reaches the utmost parts of the earth.' The head-fountain and the river of true life is Jesus and His holy grace. Hear how He addresses the Samaritan woman: 'If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water' (St. John iv.). And He continues

the description, saying: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever: but the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.' Mary drew first from the Saviour's fountains. Mary was watered at the fountain-head of this great and mighty stream, which through her was spread all over the world. The river of God's grace flows through the mystical paradise, that is through Mary; and through her loving hands it reaches our sinful souls.

Mary is compared to paradise, but she was more blessed than the delightful garden in which our first parents dwelt. The terrestrial paradise, though a place of pleasure and happiness, stood open to the infernal enemy, who, by means of his evil suggestions, could disturb and did destroy the peace of its privileged inhabitants. But Mary, the mystical paradise of God, was so well closed and guarded, that the venomous serpent could not penetrate therein, nor could he ever exhale there his poisonous breath.

Yes, the Mother of God is truly a spiritual paradise more blessed than Eden, and more blessed with regard to us. For, as Holy Scrip-

ture tells us, God placed angels with a flaming sword at the entrance of the terrestrial paradise, to prevent the children of Adam from entering it. But this spiritual garden of pleasure is open to all ; all are invited to enter it : there is room for all in Mary's maternal heart ; even the sinners are admitted, and find in this heavenly paradise an easy path to the tree of life, the source of grace.

We read in the life of St. Gertrude, that one day, as this holy virgin offered herself to God during her prayer, and inquired how He desired her to occupy herself at this time, He replied : ' Honour My Mother, who is seated at My side, and employ yourself in praising her.' Then the saint began to salute the Queen of Heaven, reciting the verse, '*Paradisus voluptatis*,' etc.—' O Paradise of pleasure' *—and extolling her because she was the abode full of delights, which the impenetrable wisdom of God, Who knows all creatures perfectly, had chosen for His dwelling ; and she besought

* In the hymn 'Psalle, plaude, mens devota,' this verse is thus given :

'Paradisus voluptatis,
Et conclave Trinitatis,
Fons divinæ gratiæ.'

See 'Summa Aurea,' vol. iv., col. 1270.

Mary to obtain for her a heart adorned with so many virtues that God might take pleasure in dwelling therein. Then the Blessed Virgin inclined towards her, and planted in her heart, as in a fertile garden, the flowers of many virtues.



III.

NOE'S ARK.

'Remansit autem solus Noe, et qui cum eo erant in arca.'—GEN. vii. 23.

'And Noe only remained, and they that were with him in the ark.'

AS the inhabitants of the earth began to multiply, and grew in number, their sins also increased. And in process of time their corruption became so great and universal, that scarcely any remains of virtue could be discovered in them. Then God, seeing that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times, it repented Him that He had made man. He resolved to sweep him off the face of the earth, and with him all the living creatures that had

been made for his service. Among the vast multitude of men then living in the world, one, Noe, found grace before the Lord. He was chosen to be the restorer of the human race. To him God communicated the resolution He had made of destroying the earth by a universal deluge, and His intention of showing mercy to him and his family.

At God's command Noe built an ark; and it was in this ark that, when the waters of the flood covered the earth, he, and his wife, and his sons, and their wives, and the animals that were with them, were saved.

When the waters of God's anger began to prevail, and increased, and gradually rose until they covered even the tops of the highest mountains, the ark was lifted up on high. And when all flesh was destroyed that moved upon the earth, and all things that lived upon the earth, from man even to beast, died, the ark did not perish, but remained safe in the midst of this general destruction.

The waters of the flood, sent upon earth on account of the wickedness of man, represent the deluge of sin, in which the whole human race was submerged, and perished. From Adam's fall to the last day, which will put an end to the present state of things here below,

all must say with David: 'Behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me' (Ps. l.). But in this universal catastrophe there is one creature that does not perish; there is an ark which rises above the waters: it is Mary, the living ark of the Lord. She was, through the foreknown merits of Jesus Christ, her Divine Son, preserved from original sin. God founded her upon the seas, and prepared her upon the rivers; in her Conception she received a blessing from the Lord, and mercy from God her Saviour (Ps. xxiii.). God helped her in the morning early; the Most High sanctified His ark, His tabernacle (Ps. xlv.).

The ark of Noe was made at God's command, and according to the description and instructions which He gave. But of Mary, the new ark of Noe, God is not only the architect; He moreover executed the work Himself. The Blessed Virgin is in a special manner God's own masterpiece, and the most admirable and excellent work of His own hands.

In the upper portion of the ark of Noe there was a large window; whereas the sides were well closed, and pitched within and without. In a similar manner the immaculate heart of the Mother of God was closed to the

world, and open to God and heavenly things. The ark had a door, which was closed by the Lord Himself; and herein we have a figure of the most pure, most admirable, and unspotted virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The first ark contained Noe, the restorer and second father of the human race. Mary, the second ark, contained, not Noe, but more than Noe, namely, Noe's Creator, who is the true Father and restorer of our race, giving not only to man a continuance of his temporal existence here on earth, but restoring to our immortal souls the life of grace, without which we would be irretrievably lost; and procuring us eternal life, by redeeming us with His precious Blood.

This world and our life here below are also represented by the deluge. The ark is a figure of the Church of God. And as all those who were outside the ark perished, so there is no salvation outside the Church.

What we here say of the Church of God, may also in a certain sense be said of our Blessed Lady, who is described by the unanimous consent of pious authors as an ark of salvation.

As those who were in the ark were preserved from the waters of the deluge, so a true servant

of Mary cannot perish. In Noe's ark a few—that is, eight souls—were saved (1 Peter iii.). In Mary many have found rest; through her many have been saved. In her—that is, in love and devotion to her—the saints have found rest, as the history of their life testifies; in her they were secure, for the Blessed Virgin obtained for them the grace to continue faithful in the service of God, and procured them by her intercession the crowning blessing of final perseverance.

Noe's ark contained not only human beings, but also animals. In these animals we may see a figure of the sinners, because they lead an animal life, gratifying their passions and their evil inclinations, neglecting their immortal soul, and forgetting their eternal destiny. If the sinner desires to escape destruction, let him enter into the ark, for the animals that were not in the ark perished. Let not the pitiful state to which his evil deeds have reduced him deter the sinner from having recourse to Mary; for even the unclean animals were called to the ark, and found shelter therein. Mary is the Mother of mercy; for the sake of the poor sinner she has become the Mother of God; and therefore she will not send away nor despise anyone.

Mary is near to all who invoke her. Holy Scripture says that the ark rested upon the mountains of Armenia, or, as we read in the Hebrew text, the mountains of Ararat, which is interpreted, the mountains of malediction. For just reasons the earth was cursed; the sinners have drawn upon themselves the anger and the curse of God. But in the midst of these mountains of malediction is the station of the Mother of God; and thus to the end of the world she remains for the guilty children of Adam an ark of blessing and salvation.

In the works of St. Bernard* we find the following description of the ark considered as a figure of our Blessed Lady:

‘The ark of Noe represented the ark of grace, that is, Mary, the most excellent among creatures. For as by the ark those who were in it were saved from the deluge, so by Mary we escape the shipwreck of sin. The ark was made by Noe, which means ‘Rest,’ for the preservation of the human race; Mary, the spiritual ark, was prepared as an instrument of the world’s redemption, by Christ, Who is our Peace and our Rest. In the ark only eight souls were saved; through Mary all are called to eternal life. The ark was built in the space

* Sermo de B. Maria, inter dubios.

of a hundred years; Mary possessed the perfection of all virtues, represented by the number 100, which is a number of fulness and perfection. As the ark floated on the waters of the deluge, so Mary was preserved from the waves of sin and destruction.'



IV.

THE RAINBOW.

'Apparebit arcus meus in nubibus, et recordabor fœderis mei vobiscum.'—GEN. ix. 14, 15.

'My bow shall appear in the clouds, and I will remember My covenant with you.'

THE waters of the flood had receded, and left the surface of the earth quite dry. At God's command Noe went out of the ark, together with his wife, and sons, and their wives, and every other living creature with them, after they had been shut up for a whole year. No sooner had Noe set his foot upon dry land, than he erected an altar, and offered to God a sacrifice in acknowledgment of His special goodness towards him. God was pleased with Noe's gratitude, and accepted his sacrifice. He blessed him and

his children, telling them to repeople the earth, which He promised never to curse again on account of the sins of men. He moreover entered into a solemn covenant with the holy patriarch and his posterity, and assigned the rainbow as a token of peace with them, saying: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I give between Me and you, and to every living soul that is with you, for perpetual generations. I will set My bow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of a covenant between Me, and between the earth. And when I shall cover the sky with clouds, My bow shall appear in the clouds. And I will remember My covenant with you; and with every living soul that beareth flesh: and there shall no more be waters of a flood, to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the clouds, and I shall see it, and shall remember the everlasting covenant, that was made between God and every living soul of all flesh which is upon the earth.'

'Mary,' says Albertus Magnus, 'is the rainbow placed in the clouds of heaven, as a sign of the covenant between heaven and earth.' And St. Bernardine of Siena writes: 'She is the rainbow of the everlasting covenant in the

clouds of heaven, so that all flesh may not be destroyed.'

Let us first consider this figure of our Blessed Lady in itself. It is an object of great beauty, and its sight fills us with pleasing admiration. 'Look upon the rainbow,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'and bless Him that made it: it is very beautiful in its brightness. It encompasseth the heaven about with the circle of its glory: the hands of the Most High have displayed it' (Eccl. xliii. 12, 13).

If Ecclesiasticus exhorts us to praise God for making the rainbow, how much more must we praise Him for having given us Mary! If we must glorify the Lord in all His works, how much more must we glorify Him in this spiritual rainbow which is the masterpiece of His hands? Mary is the most excellent of God's creatures; and He made her in a special manner for our sake. If it is our duty to thank the Lord for all the gifts He gives us in connection with our temporal life here on earth, what thanks shall we render to Him for having given us His own Blessed Mother to be our Mother also, and to help us in obtaining eternal happiness!

Mary, as well as the rainbow, is an object of great and ineffable beauty; and the sight, yea,

even the mere recollection of her, suffices to instil gladness into the most afflicted heart. When we look at our Lady's image, when we behold her with her Divine Son in her arms, we are forcibly reminded of God's mercy and goodness; the great Creator has become a little Child for our sake; His Mother is our Mother also, full of kindness and compassion; she presents the Divine Child to us, and speaks to Him in our favour. We are then not abandoned yet, however miserable we may be; for in Mary we have an Advocate, and in Jesus a Redeemer.

The inspired writer draws our attention especially to two things in the rainbow: its brightness, and its form. 'It is beautiful in its brightness,' he says; 'and it encompasseth the heaven with a circle.' Let us consider these two points in detail.

The beauty of the rainbow, as Cornelius a Lapide, with many other writers, says, proceeds from its three principal colours, which are so harmoniously blent that they form, if we may say so, a sweet music to our eyes. James de Voragine calls the Blessed Virgin 'A heavenly rainbow, having the red colour of charity, the hyacinth of purity, the blue of compassion, the green of virtue and grace.'

Bernardine de Busto, comparing the Mother of God to the rainbow, also sees in the red colour a symbol of her ardent charity, in the blue her compassion, in the hyacinth her contemplation, and in the green her virginity. As many beautiful colours and shades as there are in the rainbow, so many sweet attractions there are for us in Mary.

It is not only in its marvellous bright colouring, but also in its graceful shape that the beauty of the rainbow consists. It encompasseth the heavens with its circular form, which is a pleasing line to the eye. As in a regular curve there is simplicity, grace, and order: so we admire in Mary's life the simplicity of her intention, for she always had God in view; the grace and surpassing beauty with which her innocent soul was endowed; and the order of her desires, which always tended to God as their end and their centre.

The two extremities of the rainbow which are bent downwards to the earth, represent the grace and the mercy of Mary. This grace and mercy, of which she is so full herself, she uses in man's favour, obtaining blessings for the just, and mercy for sinners. 'This mystical rainbow,' writes St. Bridget in her

revelations, 'inclines itself towards the inhabitants of the world, touching by her prayers the just and the wicked: the just in order that they may persevere, the wicked that they may repent.' And St. Bernard says that Mary 'is all to all; to the wise and the unwise she has become surety by her overflowing charity.'

The rainbow is, moreover, a beautiful figure of our Lady's Immaculate Conception. For it is produced by the sun in a bright cloud which abounds in moisture. And Mary was created by the Most High in the brightness of holiness and the abundance of all grace. Nothing can ever tarnish the beautiful and resplendent colours of the rainbow. Neither could any stain of sin ever sully the surpassing beauty of Mary's Immaculate Heart.

St. John tells us, in the Book of Revelation, that he saw a rainbow round about the throne in heaven. In a mystical sense we may say that this rainbow represents the Blessed Virgin, who surrounds the throne of God by her assiduous prayers and her kind intercession in our behalf. Therefore the Church confidently addresses our Blessed Lady in these words: 'O most worthy Queen of the world, Mary ever virgin, intercede for our peace and

welfare, thou who didst bring forth Christ the Lord, the Saviour of all mankind.' *

Oh, what blessing for us to have this beautiful rainbow in heaven! So highly exalted, so near to the throne of God, and yet so attentive to our prayers, and so solicitous for our welfare! If at the sight of the rainbow the Lord remembers His covenant with the earth, surely at the sight of Mary, the mystical rainbow, He will be mindful of His mercy towards man; He will be favourable to the devout servants of His beloved Mother. All must, then, look up to this heavenly rainbow with pleasure and confidence. The just will see in it a model, an inducement to perfection, a means and a pledge of perseverance; and poor sinners a sign of reconciliation and peace with God.

At the sight of this mystical rainbow, St. Bonaventure exclaims:

*Nubibus cœli cerneris,
Arcus quæ nos illuminas,
Refulgens, morum miseris
Exempla cuncta seminas.*

*Labor et timor fugiunt
Arcu monstrato fœderis,
Spes et gaudium veniunt
Peccatoribus miseris.*

° Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel: Communion of the Mass.

*Arcus insuperabilis,
Arcus potens, arcus fortis,
Arcus dulcis, amabilis,
Arcus patens cœli portis !*

*Post præsentis metam mortis
Nobis inevitabilis,
Fac consortes tuæ sortis
Nos, Virgo venerabilis !*

In the clouds of the heavens so bright,
Graceful rainbow, thou oft dost appear,
Gently spreading the beautiful light
Of thy virtues on thy children dear.

Fear, and labour, and sorrow depart
At the sight of this beautiful bow ;
Hope and joy are restored to the heart
Of the sinner who mourns here below.

Blessed rainbow so sweet to behold,
Thou in power and in glory so high,
Mary, rainbow in beauty untold,
Shining brilliantly forth in the sky !

When our eyes in departing shall close,
When our exile shall end here below,
Pray that He, Who for Mother thee chose,
May His blessing on us then bestow !



V.

SARA.

'Dic, obsecro te, quod soror mea sis : ut vivat anima mea ob gratiam tu.'—GEN. xii. 13.

'Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister, that my soul may live for thy sake.'



ABRAHAM, the holy Patriarch and Father of the Faithful, went by God's command out of Haran, taking with him Sarai his wife, and all his substance. As he was making his way through Chanaan, there came a famine in the country, and Abraham went down into Egypt, to sojourn there : for the famine was very grievous in the land. And when he was near to enter into Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife : *'Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister : that I may be well used for thee, and that my soul may live for thy*

sake.' And when they were come into Egypt, the woman was taken into the house of Pharaoh, and they used Abraham well for her sake.

Between this Sarai the wife of Abraham, afterwards called Sara, and Agar her hand-maid, the Apostle St. Paul draws a comparison in his Epistle to the Galatians in these words: 'It is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bond-woman, and the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman, was born according to the flesh: but he of the free-woman, was by promise. Which things are said by an allegory.'

St. Paul explains the allegory as having regard to the two testaments, the old and the new; or the two laws, the law of fear and the law of grace, the law of Moses and the law of Jesus Christ.

One of the two mothers is described as being a bond-woman, the other as being a free-woman. Isaac was born by promise, of the free-woman. The author of the New Law, and founder of the New Testament, whom Isaac represents, was also born by promise, of a free-woman. With many Saints and Fathers, therefore, we cannot but notice that there are many points of similitude between Sara and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

St. Bonaventure remarks that the Mother of God is properly represented by Sara, of whom God said : ' I will bless her, and of her I will give thee a son, whom I will bless ' (Gen. xvii. 16).

St. Jerome, in his Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, explaining the 16th and 17th verses of the tenth chapter, ' Blessed is the land whose king is noble,' writes as follows : ' Woe to the land whose king is the devil. But blessed is the land of the Church whose king is Jesus Christ, a Son of noble lineage. He descends from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from prophets and saints, who shook off the yoke of sin, and were therefore truly free. Of these was born a Virgin still more free, namely Mary. The apostles and saints of the Church are princes, having for their king a noble Son, a free Son, born not of the bond-woman Agar, but of the liberty of Sara.'

What a contrast between freedom and slavery ! The worst kind of slavery is to sigh under the tyranny of the devil and sin. There is not a more degrading or a more disastrous yoke than that of Satan, and his subjects are abject slaves. True liberty is found only in the service of God. True nobility results from our spiritual relationship with God, our

heavenly Father, of which St. John says : ' He gave them power to be made the sons of God, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' The highest nobility and the greatest freedom consist, then, in being children of God, and free from sin. St. Jerome calls the patriarchs of old free, because they would not allow sin or the devil to reign over them. Sara was a free-woman according to nature. The saints were made free by grace. But Mary enjoyed a greater freedom ; she could lay claim on a higher nobility. Our Blessed Redeemer, a free and noble Son, descends from a free-woman by nature, Sara. His Mother, Mary, was a perfectly free-woman by grace, by her complete immunity from the bondage of the devil. The liberty of Sara is therefore only a shadow of the true and perfect liberty which the Blessed Virgin enjoyed. Whence St. Proclus properly styles Mary 'the free-woman, of whom the beloved Isaac (Christ) was born.'

George Reismyler, doctor of divinity, points out another similitude between Sara and the Mother of God, in the many journeys which both had to undertake. Sara travelled with Abraham, her husband ; the Blessed Virgin

Mary was accompanied by her holy Spouse, St. Joseph. Both had to encounter many dangers, and to endure many afflictions in their peregrinations. Both were promptly obedient. The Lord said to Abraham: 'Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee.' Abraham took Sara his wife, and they departed for the land of Chanaan. And there came a famine in the country, and they went down into Egypt. When the famine had ceased, they returned by the way they had come, from the south of Bethel, to the place where before Abraham had pitched his tent.

Our Blessed Lady went with St. Joseph to Bethlehem, not at the express command of God, but to comply with an order from Cæsar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled, every one in his own city. When God speaks to us immediately, it would be great blindness and great wickedness indeed not to obey. But when He makes His holy will known through creatures, through what would appear to be fortuitous circumstances, then we find it sometimes difficult to say: 'My God, Thy will be done.' Yet, what are our afflictions compared to the trials which

our Blessed Lady endured on the occasion of her journey to Bethlehem! Sufferings on the way from want and fatigue; sufferings in the city, for there was no room for her in the inns; and the true Isaac, in Whom all nations are blessed, was born in a stable and laid in a manger!

Abraham went down with Sara into Egypt. To this very same country Mary also went. An Angel of the Lord, as St. Matthew tells us, appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: 'Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him.' It must have been no slight affliction to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph to hear that the death of the Divine Child was sought after. They found themselves reduced to the painful necessity of fleeing into a distant and unknown country, through rough and dangerous ways. They were exiles, banished without cause from their native land, reduced to sojourn in a strange country for seven years.

Let us well understand, and constantly remember that we are pilgrims and strangers here below. The earth is a place of pilgrimage for us; we have here no lasting dwelling; we

are incessantly drawing nearer to the unknown region of eternity ; and, as Christians, we are travelling towards the true land of promise. Like Abraham and Sara, like the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, let us walk before the Lord, let us travel in the company of Jesus, not attaching ourselves to the transitory and deceitful world, but keeping our eyes and our heart fixed upon God, our supreme good, our only treasure.

Abraham said to Sara : ' Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister ; that I may be well used for thee, and that my soul may live for thy sake.' Abraham made this request, in order that for Sara's sake his life might be saved. Are we not in danger, and in greater danger than Abraham was ? Who can flatter himself with the assurance of being justified before God ; with being acceptable to His Infinite Majesty ; with having atoned for so many sins and infidelities ? Where are the good works upon which we may rely ? Our soul is then in danger, in imminent danger of eternal death and reprobation.

What can we do better than have recourse to Mary, and ask her to take us under her protection ? Perhaps for her sake God will spare us, and be merciful to us, wretched

sinners. He will spare us for her sake, for she is pleasing and acceptable to Him. Let us, according to the advice of St. Bonaventure entreat Mary, as Abraham entreated Sara, addressing her with these words: 'Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister: that I may be well used for thee, and that my soul may live for thy sake.'—'O Mary, O sweet Sara, say that thou art our sister, in order that God may be propitious to us for thy sake, and that our soul may live before Him! O dearest Sara, say that thou art our sister, in order that for the sake of such a sister the Egyptians, that is the devils, may fear us; that for the sake of this sister the holy angels may assist and defend us; and that for the sake of this sister the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost may bless us, and have mercy on us!'



VI.

REBECCA.

'Puella decora nimis, virgoque pulcherrima, et incognita viro.'—GEN. xxiv. 16.

'An exceeding comely maid, and most beautiful virgin, and not known to man.'

WHEN Abraham had grown old, and was advanced in years, the happy settlement of his son Isaac became the serious object of his thoughts. He knew how much the happiness of man depends upon the woman whom he takes for partner in life. In the consort he proposed for Isaac, he expected more essential qualifications than he could discover amongst the daughters of Chanaan; he sought a woman whose piety might draw down the blessings of heaven upon his son, at the same time that she should

become his wife; and such a woman, he thought, was not to be met with, but amongst his own kindred in Mesopotamia. Thither he sent Eliezer, his household steward, with instructions how to act.

Eliezer, being come near to the city of Nachor, humbly prayed for success, asking God that, by some visible sign, he might know the maiden who was to be Isaac's future consort. The sign he prayed for was, that of all the young women who were then coming out of the town, according to custom, to fetch water from an adjacent well, whosoever upon his speaking to her would offer to let him and his cattle drink, he should look upon her as the person chosen for his master's son.

He had scarce ended his prayer, when Rebecca, the daughter of Bathuel, came to the spring. She was an exceeding comely maid, and a most beautiful virgin, not known to man. When she had filled her pitcher, and was going off with it upon her shoulder, Eliezer asked her to let him drink. She answered: 'Drink, my lord.' And quickly letting down the pitcher upon her arm, she gave him drink. And when he had drunk, she said: 'I will draw water for thy camels

also, till they all drink.' Eliezer being now persuaded that Rebecca was the maiden whom God had destined for Isaac, immediately presented her with a pair of golden ear-rings and bracelets, and exclaimed: 'Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not taken away His mercy and His truth from my master.' The next morning Rebecca, with the consent of her parents, set out with Eliezer for the land of Chanaan. Isaac took her to wife, and she became the mother of two children, Esau and Jacob.

St. Thomas of Villanova, and St. Bonaventure apply to the Blessed Virgin Mary the description which the Book of Genesis gives of Rebecca: 'An exceeding comely maid, and most beautiful virgin, and not known to man.' Mary is styled 'all fair,' because as regards beauty in the eyes of God, beauty of heart and soul, no creature ever equalled her. Whence St. Jerome says: 'Consider Mary carefully, and you will see that there is no virtue, no beauty, no brightness, no glory which does not shine forth in her.' And St. Antonine, comparing the Blessed Virgin to Rebecca, remarks that 'Mary was prefigured by the beautiful Rebecca, but she was far more beautiful.' To her also the Church applies the

words of the Cantic: 'How beautiful art thou! thy eyes are dove's eyes, besides what is hid within.' St. Bridget frequently addressed the Mother of God in the following terms: 'O sweet Virgin, new in beauty, most bright in comeliness, come to my assistance, and dispel the ugliness of my sins!'

Abraham sent his steward from the land of Chanaan to Rebecca; he found her by a spring of pure water, and gave her ear-rings and bracelets. God the Father, having chosen the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of His beloved Son, sent a messenger, the Archangel Gabriel, from heaven, the true Chanaan, or land of promise. The heavenly messenger found her a Virgin, surpassing all other virgins in beauty of purity and holiness. He found her by the spring of the living waters of grace and of contemplation; and He, who also thirsted for the redemption of man, received the drink of her consent, in this truly admirable reply: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word.' The archangel gave her spiritual ear-rings, when he whispered in her ears the sweet words of his message: 'Hail, thou full of grace!' He gave her bracelets, saying: 'The Lord is with thee!' As Mary became the Mother of God, it was her

privilege to carry Jesus with the greatest love and tenderness in her arms.

Rebecca had two sons who, though born at the same time, were very different from one another. Esau, as Holy Scripture says, was hairy; he became a skilful hunter, and a husbandman; but Jacob dwelt in tents. The Blessed Virgin Mary also had two children, who, like Esau and Jacob, were in a manner born at the same time; for when she became Mother of Jesus, she also became the Mother of the human race, of which He is the true life and light.

Between Mary's two children there is a very great difference indeed; and this difference is in a spiritual manner shown in the qualities and dispositions of Esau and Jacob, and in the memorable events of their life. Jacob, who was tenderly beloved by Rebecca his mother, is, as St. Augustine explains, a figure of Christ, and Esau represents the human race. Esau sold his birthright for a pottage of lentils; man also sold his right to the kingdom of heaven at a vile price—yea, for the wages of sin. Jacob, who was smooth, appeared before his father covered with kid-skins, which Rebecca had put upon him, in order that he might be similar to his brother, who was a

hairy man. Our Lord Jesus Christ took upon Himself our human nature, being born of the Virgin Mary, and thus presented Himself before His heavenly Father, to atone for our sins. He redeemed us in quality of God-man, or God and man together: for as God He could not suffer, as man He could not atone.

Esau hated Jacob, and threatened to kill him. Our Divine Saviour, 'Who went about doing good,' became an object of hatred to the Jews, His own brethren; they rendered Him evil for good, and sought His death. Not the Jews only, however, but we all have become guilty of His Blood, since He died for our sins.

We may also reverse the similitude of the two brothers, and look upon Esau, the first-born, as a figure of Christ, and take Jacob as a type of man.

'Mary,' as St. Antonine remarks, 'is represented by Rebecca, who directed and assisted her son Jacob in preparing a repast pleasing to his Father. She covered him with his brother's garments, so that he might obtain the blessing of the first-born.' Rebecca was desirous that her son Jacob, whom she tenderly loved, should obtain his father's blessing. She put on him Esau's best garments, which she had

at home with her, and the little skins of the kids she put about his hands, and covered the bare of his neck; and she gave him the savoury meat, and delivered him bread that she had baked. And Isaac blessed Jacob, saying, 'God give thee the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, abundance of corn and wine.'

As Rebecca loved Jacob, so Mary loves us: she wishes to make us partakers of the Divine blessings; she covers us with her maternal protection; she teaches us to offer a sacrifice pleasing to our heavenly Father, by her sublime example, and the numerous graces which she obtains for us; and by her powerful prayers and supplications, she adorns and enriches us with the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ.

Rebecca is also a type of Mary in her sorrows. Her cry of grief is thus given in Genesis: 'If it was to be so with me, what need was there to conceive!' In after times, her two sons became a cause of anxiety, and a source of sorrow to her maternal heart.

Mary did not acquire the glorious title of her Maternity without suffering; through it she became the Mother of sorrows, and the Queen of martyrs. Scarcely was Jesus born,

when it was foretold her that a sword of grief would pierce her soul. And when thirty-three years of anxiety and trials had passed, and the great Sacrifice was consummated on Calvary, she could exclaim with more truth than Jeremias lamenting the woes of Jerusalem, 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow !'

Let the trials of Rebecca and of the Mother of God remind us of the important fact, that all the saints have been tried by sufferings. How then can we, wretched sinners, expect to live in constant peace, and happiness of mind and body, and to have everything according to our wishes? Let us remember that 'whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth,' and that we must now walk to heaven along the thorny path of suffering, to pluck the roses hereafter.

Rebecca gave Eliezer to drink, saying: 'Drink, my lord;' and when he had drunk, she added, 'I will draw water for thy camels also, till they all drink.' And pouring out the pitcher into the troughs, she ran back to the well to draw water: and having drawn, she gave to all the camels.'

'Mary, the spiritual Rebecca,' says St. Antonine, 'is attentive to the wants, not only of the just, who make a good use of their intellect,

by procuring them the water of grace in their thirst; but even of sinners, who are similar to unreasonable animals, by offering them drink, when they do not ask for it, nor feel any desire for it.

Here we may well exclaim with Glossa, ‘O Mary, give me a little water of thy pitcher! for from the pitcher of the world I have drunk vanity, from the pitcher of the devil iniquity.’ Alas! we have drunk from the pitcher of the world, and our thirst has not been quenched: we have drunk of the pitcher of the devil, and our heart has been filled with bitterness and remorse!

‘O Mary, kind Rebecca, plead once more in our behalf as thou didst plead at the marriage-feast of Cana! And obtain for us from thy Divine Son the water of grace, and the wine of spiritual consolation!’



VII.

JACOB'S LADDER.

'Vidit in somnis scalam stantem super terram, et cacumen illius tangens cœlum.'—GEN. xxviii. 12.

'He saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven.'

JACOB had obtained the blessing of the first-born. Esau said in his heart: 'The days will come of the mourning of my father, and I will kill my brother.' The violence of his anger made it no longer safe for Jacob to remain with him under the same roof. Rebecca foresaw the storm, and trembled at the thought of what might be the consequence. Her apprehensions for the safety of a beloved son awakened all the tenderness of a mother's affection, and she studied to find a means to save him. She wisely judged that

Esau's resentment might cool by length of time, if the object of it were but removed out of sight. She opened her mind on the subject to Isaac her husband, and entreated him to let Jacob go to her father Bathuel in Mesopotamia.

With Isaac's blessing, Jacob quitted his native home ; and being departed from Bersabee, he went on to Haran. And when he was come to a certain place, and would rest in it after sunset, he took of the stones that lay there ; and putting them under his head, he slept in the same place.

'And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven : the angels also of God ascending and descending by it, and the Lord leaning upon the ladder, saying to him : 'I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.'

This ladder which Jacob saw in his sleep is generally looked upon as a figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Among the Fathers and Saints who have made this comparison, are St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, St. Fulgentius, St. Bernard, and St. Bonaventure. 'Mary,' says the last-named, 'is the spiritual ladder which Jacob saw in his sleep.'—'And what,'

asks venerable Godfrey, Abbot of Admont, 'could be better represented by this ladder than the Blessed Virgin Mary, who constantly tended from this earth to heaven?'

A ladder is a means of communication between the ground and a more elevated position. Mary is therefore properly compared to a ladder, and in particular to Jacob's ladder, for she was a means of communication between heaven and earth. And as the angels of God ascended and descended by Jacob's ladder, so, says St. Bonaventure, 'by this ladder (that is by Mary) the Angel of the Great Council (Jesus Christ) descended to take our nature. By it also the angels ascend; those, namely, who lead an angelic life.'* And St. Fulgentius calls Mary 'a heavenly ladder, because by her God descended to the earth, in order that by her also man might ascend to heaven.'

We may also say that to this ladder, and by this ladder, the angels descended on the occasion of our Lady's Annunciation, when Gabriel was despatched from heaven. For it appears not unlikely that this heavenly messenger did not come alone to salute a Virgin so excellent; but that, as a noble prince, he was accompanied by a multitude of celestial

* De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, iii. 7.

spirits. By this ladder—to wit, Mary, the great instrument of our redemption—the angels also descended on Christmas night, when the shepherds were favoured with the apparition of a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God, and saying: ‘Glory be to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will.’

And how often must the angels have ascended with Mary’s prayers, and desires, and heavenly colloquies! We may then properly say that the angels descended and ascended by this mysterious ladder, on account of their frequent and familiar intercourse with the Mother of God.

As the ladder stood erect upon the earth, so Mary stood, during her whole life, ever erect towards God. She stood, for she never fell; she was never prostrated by sin, either actual or original. As the top of Jacob’s ladder touched heaven, so Mary reached heaven by her celestial life on earth, and by her sublime contemplation. She reached heaven—yea, the heights of heaven—by the singular abundance and sublimity of her prerogatives, her virtues, and her merits.

‘And the Lord leaning upon the ladder.’
As Mary leaned upon God in her Conception,

in her Annunciation, in all the great works which were wrought in her, so God leaned in a manner upon Mary in the Incarnation.

St. Bonaventure gives a further description of this mysterious ladder. 'Its sides,' he says, 'are the two tribes, namely the sacerdotal and the royal tribe, from which the Blessed Virgin sprung.' The two sides are also said to represent Mary's virginity and her maternity. And these two sides of the ladder are united by the steps of humility, faith, hope, charity, obedience, prudence, compassion—in a word, by all her virtues.

At the foot of the ladder Jacob lay prostrate in his sleep. He had been forced to leave his native home, and was as a fugitive in a strange land. The patriarch here represents the human race. We also have been forced to leave our primitive home, being driven out of paradise; and now we are strangers and travellers here on earth. The human race is prostrate by sin; asleep in ignorance and forgetfulness of God. Let us, however, not be discouraged; for, as St. Peter Damian says, 'Mary is the heavenly ladder by which the Great King descends in humility, and man, who lay prostrate, ascends in sublimity.'

Devotion to our Blessed Lady may also be

called a heavenly ladder, for it is a sure pledge of salvation. As those who ascend a ladder touch it with their hands and with their feet, so we must touch this mysterious ladder, Mary, with our hands, that is with our works, by following her example ; and with our feet, by resting upon her with unshaken confidence, and bearing her a constant love.

The sinner especially, who sees in Jacob lying prostrate an image of his own soul, should have recourse to this ladder. For Blessed Albert assures us that Mary is the ladder by which we ascend from sin to grace. And St. Bernard says : ' She is a ladder to sinners ; she is my greatest trust.' A sinner, however great and numerous his crimes may be, need not despair, if he will but have recourse to this mysterious ladder, if he will but recommend himself to Mary.

As we are all poor sinners, as we all stand in need of grace, as we all desire to ascend to heaven, let us hasten to this ladder of salvation.

It is related in the Chronicles of the Order of St. Francis, that blessed Brother Giles was favoured with the following vision :

It seemed to him that the time of the general judgment had come ; the angels sounded their

trumpets; and an innumerable multitude assembled on a vast plain. He then beheld two ladders placed one on either side, one red, the other white; and both reached from the earth to heaven. Christ appeared on the top of the red ladder, and seemed to be offended, and full of indignation. The blessed Father St. Francis stood on the ladder at no great distance from our Saviour. And, descending somewhat, he cried out with a loud voice, calling his brethren, and saying: 'Come, my brethren, come up to the Lord Who calls you; have confidence and fear not. Come!' Many of his children approached, and, encouraged by the words of their Father, began courageously to mount the red ladder. And as they were climbing up, one fell from the third step, another from the fourth, a third from the tenth, some when they had reached the middle of the ladder, others when they were near the top. At this sight, St. Francis, moved with compassion, addressed the Supreme Judge in favour of his children. But Christ showed to the Holy Father His hands and His side, in which the wounds appeared quite fresh, blood flowing from them; and He said: 'Behold what thy brethren have done!'

The blessed Father, however, continued

to plead for his children. And after a brief interval he again descended a little, and cried out: 'Do not despair, my brethren! Have confidence; make haste; run to the white ladder; there you will succeed; by that ladder you will ascend!' And as the brethren were running to the white ladder, according to their Father's advice, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared on its summit. She received them kindly, and without difficulty they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

St. Bonaventure sings the praises of this mystical ladder in the following sweet and melodious strains:

*Dormiens Jacob somnio,
Scalam vidit contingentem
Cælum; cujus confinio
Deum vidit innitentem.*

*Angelorum descendentem
Cætum vidit; promissio
Terræ sanctæ per Potentem
Datur, et benedictio.*

*O Maria, figuraris
Scala, sed scalam superas;
Ab Angelo salutaris,
Deum hominem generas.*

*Omnes virtutes superas,
Super angelos collocaris,
Genus humanum liberas;
Ergo longe plus liberas.*

Holy Jacob in his sleep,
With mysterious meaning,
Saw a ladder high and steep,
On which God was leaning.

Angels he beheld descending,
And returning heavenwards bound ;
God to him, in blessing bending,
Promised all the land around.

Thee we in this ladder see,
Mary, Virgin-Mother blest !
For the angel greeteth thee,
And on thee the Lord doth rest.

Placed above the angels bright,
Sending forth thy brilliant rays,
Mother of our soul's true light,
Oh, how great must be thy praise !



VIII.

RACHEL.

*' Rachel curatorem Ægypti gestavit:
Salvatorem mundi Maria portavit.*

OFFIC. IMM. CONC.

' As the saviour of Egypt upon Rachel's knee,
So the world's great Redeemer was cherished by thee.'

DURING his stay at the house of his uncle Laban, Jacob married Rachel, whom holy Scripture describes as 'well-favoured, and of beautiful countenance.' Jacob sojourned in that place for some years, and became rich. Rachel bore him a son, whom she called Joseph. Then Jacob said to his father-in-law: 'Send me away that I may return into my country, and to my land.' And having understood that it was the will of God he should depart, he took all his sub-

stance, and set out on his return journey to Chanaan in Laban's absence; and Rachel stole away her father's idols.

Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had departed. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after his son-in-law seven days, and overtook him in the mount of Galaad. He upbraided him for going away without his knowledge, and said: 'Suppose thou didst desire to go to thy friends, and hadst a longing after thy father's house; why hast thou stolen away my gods?' Jacob did not know that Rachel had taken the idols. Rachel hastily hid the little gods under the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. As soon as her father entered the tent, she began to make excuses for not rising, under the pretence of not being well. Laban found nothing; and in the end he entered with Jacob into a solemn league, and they parted good friends.

Nine years passed, and Rachel was on the point of becoming a mother once more; but she was in danger. 'And when her soul was departing for pain, and death was now at hand, she called the name of her son Benoni, that is, the son of my pain; but his father called him Benjamin, that is, the son of the right-hand. So Rachel died, and was buried in the high-

way that leadeth to Ephrata, this is Bethlehem. And Jacob erected a pillar over her sepulchre.'

Great was the affection of Jacob for Rachel: great also, and singular indeed, was the love of God for the Blessed Virgin Mary. To her we may apply the words of the Psalmist: 'Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.' The source of God's affection for us is His grace, which adorns our soul, and makes us pleasing in His sight. When a soul is in the state of grace, God sees in it a reflection of His perfections. God hates the sinner, for his soul is deprived of grace; and far from reflecting the Creator's image, it has become like unto the devil. The souls of the just are in the hand of God; He takes special care of them all; He loves them all; but the greater or lesser degree of intensity of the love He bears them, depends upon the degree of grace and perfection which they have reached. What creature ever loved God as Mary did? What creature was ever faithful to God's grace as she was? 'O Mary, thou art full of grace! Thy heart was full of love divine, and knew no other love! Therefore God loved thee above all other creatures, and the great King of heaven

took delight in the beauty of thy pure soul !'

'As the saviour of Egypt upon Rachel's knee,
So the world's great Redeemer was cherished by thee.'

We may see a figure of Mary in Rachel on account of her children. Rachel's eldest son, Joseph, was a striking type of Christ. He was his father's dearly beloved son. He was amiable and good ; yet his brothers hated him. They even resolved to kill him. He was sold by his own brothers, and taken to Egypt. He was cast into prison as a malefactor. But from that prison he was brought before Pharaoh as a man inspired by God. The king changed his name 'Joseph,' into that of 'Saviour of the world.' And he saved from famine and death, along with many others, those very brethren who had hated and ill-treated him.

Jesus also was the most beloved Son of the Eternal Father. He went about doing good, and proposed Himself as an example of meekness. Yet His own brethren, His own chosen people hated Him, and they sought His death. He was sold to His enemies by one of His own apostles. He was crucified as a malefactor, and died the most ignominious death between two thieves. But it was by His very death that He redeemed the world ; and His

Cross and His tomb proclaimed the glory of His Divinity. He bore the name of 'Jesus'—that is, 'Saviour'—not in figure, but in reality; for He is truly the Saviour of the world; and He frees from eternal death both His own brethren, the Jewish people, and all the nations of the world.

Rachel had besides Joseph another son, Benjamin, whom she called the 'son of her pain.' We occupy Benjamin's place; we are the children of Mary's sorrow: she brought us forth under the Cross of Jesus, when a sword of anguish pierced her soul. The words: 'Woman, behold thy Son,' found an echo in her maternal heart; and we became the children of the Queen of Martyrs. Hear how the great St. Bernard speaks on this sublime subject:

'Truly, O Blessed Mother, did the lance pierce thy soul, for it could not reach thy Son's side but by first passing through thy heart. And when Jesus had given up the ghost, the cruel lance surely did not wound His soul, but thine indeed it pierced. His soul was no longer there, but thine could not be detached from the Victim of our Redemption. A sword of sorrow pierced thy heart, and not without reason do we call thee 'more than Martyr,' as

the sentiments of thy loving compassion far exceeded all corporal sufferings. But, you will say, did she not know beforehand that He would die? Undoubtedly. And did she notwithstanding grieve over His Passion and Death? Yes, most bitterly. For should we wonder more at Mary's sorrow than at the sufferings of her Son? Jesus died corporally: could not Mary die with Him spiritually? Jesus' death was the effect of a charity greater than which no man hath: Mary's sorrow was produced by a love unequalled among creatures.*

Rachel stole away her father's idols, and hid them. Laban's search proved fruitless: he could not find them, and departed without them. Here Rachel represents the Blessed Virgin, whom the Church thus addresses in her Office: 'Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for thou alone hast destroyed all heresies in the whole world.' And how does the Mother of God destroy the heresies? Listen to St. Bonaventure:†

*'Hæreses omnes terminas,
Et hæreticos conteris,
In Christo quando geminas
Naturas simul congeris.'*

Which may be thus rendered:

° Ex Serm. de Duodecimo Stellis. † Laus B.M.V.

‘Thou, Mary, dost destroy all heresies. By thee
The heretics are crushed with power from above.
Thou showest them thy Son, God-man, Who makes
us free ;
Thou leadest them to Him, and teachest them His
love.’

As an illustration of the saint’s words, let us take the Nestorian heresy, and its condemnation at the Council of Ephesus. The following was the system of Nestorius :

‘Jesus Christ,’ he said, ‘is properly only man, who was united with the Word, and filled with the power of God more than any of the prophets or saints had ever been. God, the Logos, and Jesus of Nazareth, are two subjects, or persons, entirely distinct, which, however, had been associated the one with the other. The man Jesus received the God within himself ; the Logos dwelt in man. The son of Mary is not truly God ; he is no more than man, who bore in his person the Divinity. The Incarnation is no more than the indwelling of God, the Word, in man. The Eternal Word was not made man ; it only united itself with man. The Word was not born of the Virgin-Mother, nor did it suffer ; it took up its abode only in him who was born of the Virgin, in him who suffered and

died. The name Christ does not signify a Man-God, but a man united with God.'

Thus taught Nestorius.*

St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, confuted this heresy, and strenuously defended the true Catholic doctrine on the Incarnation. The Council proclaimed Mary 'the Mother of God,' and the Nestorian heresy was crushed.

The Catholic Church has always, and rightly, put her hope and trust in the Mother of God. Hence it has always been the habit of Catholics, in dangers and in times of trouble, to flee for refuge to Mary, and to seek for peace in her maternal goodness. Ancient and modern history, and the more sacred annals of the Church, alike bear witness to public and private supplications addressed to the Mother of God, to the help which she has given in return, and to the peace and tranquillity which she has obtained from God. It was by the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin that the Albigensian heresy was checked. The same names of 'Mary' and 'the Rosary' are associated with the miraculous victories of Lepanto, Temeswar, and Corfu. The Mother of God always protects and defends the Church, as Pius VII. acknowledged when he attributed

* Döllinger, History of the Church.

to her intercession that he had been twice restored to the Pontifical See, in memory of which he instituted the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians; following herein the example, and completing, as it were, what St. Pius V. had done after the victory which the Christians gained in the naval battle near the Echinades islands, when he ordered that to the glorious titles of Our Lady in her litany should be added the invocation, 'Help of Christians,' and instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victory, which Gregory XIII. ordered to be celebrated under the title of 'The Holy Rosary.' Thus Mary, by checking the heresies and defending the inheritance of her Divine Son, still crushes the serpent's head.

To Rachel's tears reference is made both in the Old and in the New Testament, in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremias, and in the second of St. Luke. In the former we read thus: 'A voice was heard on high of lamentation, of mourning, and weeping, of Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted for them, because they are not.'

Here, again, Rachel is a figure of Mary. Not only did the Mother of God weep at the foot of the Cross, but she still weeps for her children.

It is, for instance, recorded in the history of our Lady of Clissa, a town in Dalmatia, that in the year 1677, as the holy Image of the Blessed Virgin was carried in procession, it shed abundant tears, a number of which were gathered up and kept with great reverence.

The same holy Image had also formerly wept, on the occasion of the Turkish invasion, as a sign of our Lady's compassion, and as if to signify that she had been pleading with her Divine Son. The voice of her weeping was heard; for shortly afterwards the Christians obtained a great victory over the Turks, who lost ten thousand men in battle.



IX.

THE BURNING BUSH.

Rubum quem viderat Moyses incombustum, conservatam agnovimus tuam laudabilem virginitatem, Dei Genitrix.—OFF. B.M.V.

‘The burning bush which Moses saw unconsumed, is a figure of thy perpetual virginity, O Mother of God!’

MOSES fled from Egypt, and abode in the land of Madian, and fed the sheep of the priest of Madian. One day he drove the flock to the inner parts of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. ‘And the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he saw that the bush was on fire, and was not burnt. And Moses said: I will go and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

And when the Lord saw that he went forward to see, He called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said : Moses, Moses ! And he answered : Here I am. And He said : Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet : for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And He said : I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face : for he durst not look at God. And the Lord said to him : I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of the rigour of them that are over the works. And knowing their sorrow, I am come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land into a good and spacious land, into a land that floweth with milk and honey.'

St. Epiphanius, St. Ephrem, St. John Damascene, St. Augustine, and many others, have seen in this wonderful bush a figure of the Mother of God. The Church also in the Divine Office teaches us to look upon it as such, and to behold in the bush which burned without being consumed an image of Mary's admirable and perpetual virginity. 'The burning bush which Moses saw unconsumed, is a

figure of thy perpetual virginity, O Mother of God !

The Lord rested in the bush : Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dwelt in Mary. The bush was not consumed by the burning flames : Mary's virginity remained intact, notwithstanding her maternity.

The Blessed Virgin is believed to have consecrated herself to God by the vow of chastity. Hence, when the archangel Gabriel announced to her that she had been chosen to become the Mother of our Saviour, she inquired how this could be done since she knew not man. And the angel answering said to her: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.' The angel explained to her that she would become mother, without losing her virginity. Then was fulfilled what the prophet Isaias foretold, saying, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.' And what son ? 'The Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' St. Bernard remarks that 'if God was to be born in this world, it was becoming that He should be born of a Virgin ; and if a Virgin was to bring forth, it was also befitting that she should bring forth no other but God.*

° Homil. 2, Super Missus.

And St. Jerome says: 'What nature cannot do, what custom has never known, what reason ignores, what the human mind cannot understand, what fills heaven with astonishment, the earth with wonder, and all the inhabitants of paradise with admiration, is by Gabriel announced to Mary on God's behalf, and is fulfilled by Christ.'*

This wonderful union of virginity and maternity in the Blessed Virgin is beautifully described in the ecclesiastical Office in the following terms: 'A virgin has brought forth a King whose name is Eternal; she has the joys of a mother with the honour of virginity: never before was there one like unto her, neither shall there be another.'†

Moses was favoured with this extraordinary vision, when God was about to deliver His people from the slavery of Egypt. For the Lord said to him: 'I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry. And knowing their sorrow, I am come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians.' What does the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt represent, but the human

* Serm. 1, De Assumpt. Epist. ad Paulam et Eustoch.

† In Nativ. Dom. ad Laudes.

race groaning under the yoke of sin, in the slavery of the devil? God saw the miserable condition of the children of men, and heard their sighs. The figures were about to be fulfilled, the symbols were going to make way for the reality. God did not now send a prophet to save His people, as He had done in days of old. He came Himself from the dwelling-place of His glory. Then once more was seen a great sight, God resting in a burning bush; no longer, however, in figure, but in reality and in truth; the Son of God resting in Mary.

The Mother of God is properly represented by the burning bush. For what better could those flames of fire denote, than the fire of charity which was burning in Mary's heart? That ardent charity which burns but does not consume? That fervent charity which ever burns without being lessened or extinguished, being nourished with fuel from above, and fed by the Holy Spirit, Who is a flame of fire? Mary's life was a life of love; her death an ecstasy of love. The perfection of her charity places her at a great distance from us, a distance which we cannot traverse, similar to that of the earth from the sun. But however far the sun be from our planet, he sheds rays

of light and warmth upon the inhabitants of the globe. Thus, although Mary's love of God far surpasses that of all creatures, and is far beyond our reach, its burning heat, its brilliant flame will enlighten us, and dispel the coldness of our hearts.

God appeared to Moses, not in a tall tree, but in an humble bush : in the fulness of time the Son of God is born, not of a noble and exalted queen of this world, but of a humble and unknown virgin. What a beautiful blending of greatness and lowliness, of virginity and humility do we find in the Blessed Virgin ! 'Blessed art thou, O Mary !' exclaims St. Bernard, 'for neither humility nor virginity were wanting in thee ! A singular virginity indeed, which was not sullied but enhanced by fecundity ; and truly an extraordinary humility which a virginal maternity did not destroy, but extol ; and assuredly an incomparable maternity, accompanied both by virginity and humility.*'

And elsewhere the same saint says : 'It was becoming the majesty of the Son of God that He should not be born but of a virgin. Hence the Creator of man, wishing to become man, and to be born as man, chose and made for

° Hom. 1, De Laud. B.M.V.

Himself a Mother worthy of Him, and pleasing to Him. He wanted her to be a spotless virgin, of whom He should be born without spot, to cleanse us from all stain of sin. He also wanted her to be humble in quality of Mother of Him Who is meek and humble of heart. He wished to be born of a virgin, whom He had beforehand inspired to make a vow of virginity, and to whom He had granted the merit of humility. In order, therefore, that the Mother of God might be holy in body, she received the gift of virginity; in order that she might be holy in mind, she was endowed with humility.* Not even the purity of the angels can be compared with the virginity of her who was found worthy to become the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost, and the dwelling-place of the Son of God. And what deep and sublime humility did she possess, together with a spotless purity and innocence, yea, with the fulness of grace!†

When Moses beheld the burning bush at a distance, he said: 'I will go and see this great sight.' Well may we, beholding the reality of that which was foreshadowed by the burning bush, say with Moses: Let us go and see this

° Hom. 2, Super Missus est.

† Serm. 4, De Assumpt.

great sight. Well may we exclaim with St. Epiphanius : ' O Virgin most holy, the sight of thee fills the angels with astonishment ! Behold a stupendous miracle in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun,* bearing in her arms the Eternal Light ! A stupendous miracle in heaven, a Virgin carrying the Son of God ! A stupendous miracle in heaven, the King of angels has become the Child of Mary !'†

St. Bonaventure beautifully describes the burning bush as a figure of the Mother of God, in the following words :

*Mater tua virginitas
Rubo montis ostenditur
Oreb, cujus viriditas
Per ardorem non uritur.*

*Sic nec tua corrumpitur
Virginalis integritas,
Dum ventre tuo jungitur
Humanitati Deitas.*

O Mother, thy virginity
Prefigured in the bush is seen,
On Horeb ; its viridity
Despite the fire, was fresh and green.

So thou a Virgin dost remain,
Though "Mother" we thee truly call,
When, Blessed Lady, without pain,
Thou bringest forth thy God, thy all.

° Apoc. xii.

† Orat. de laud. Deip.



X.

MARY, THE SISTER OF MOSES.

Et nomen virginis Maria.—LUC. i.

‘And the virgin’s name was Mary.’



THE Israelites, under the guidance of Moses, had passed through the Red Sea. The prophet, at God’s command, had stretched forth his hand, and the waters, returning, had covered and destroyed Pharaoh’s army. Then Moses, and the children of Israel after him, sang a canticle of thanksgiving, saying: ‘Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified, the horse and the rider He hath thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become salvation to me. He is my God, and I will glorify Him.’

When the men had concluded the hymn, Mary the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went forth after her. And she began the song to them, saying: 'Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified, the horse and the rider He hath thrown into the sea.'

This Mary, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is in many respects a type of our Blessed Lady. She sang a hymn, saying: 'Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified!' The Blessed Virgin also, inspired by the Holy Ghost, sang a canticle, and exclaimed: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord!'

The canticle of the Mother of God was far more sublime than that of Moses' sister, and was sung on a much more solemn occasion. It was not one nation now which was delivered from its enemies; the great work of our Redemption had begun: God Himself was there to save all the nations of the earth from the slavery of the infernal enemy.

The 'Magnificat' sung by our Blessed Lady is, as Canisius remarks, the first hymn of the New Testament, as the canticle sung by Mary, the sister of Moses, who was a type of the Blessed Virgin, is the first hymn of the Old Testament. This noble prophetess, who directed

the other women in singing the praises of God, prefigured our Blessed Lady, who directs, not the Israelites only, but all the nations of the earth in singing the praises of the Lord; and that not merely by their lips, but especially with a pure heart and a perfect mind.

Mary, Moses' sister, was a type of our Blessed Lady because, as Gregory Nyssenus remarks, she also was a virgin. For, he says, had she been married, she would have been called after her husband, and not simply sister of Aaron. Besides, in no place of Holy Scripture do we find mention of her husband. The same opinion is held by St. Ambrose.

As Mary, the sister of Moses and Aaron, went out before the others, so the Blessed Virgin Mary also leads the way, according to the words of the forty-fourth Psalm, which are applied to her: 'After her shall virgins be brought to the King: her neighbours shall be brought to thee. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing.' Bellarmine remarks that what is said here of the spouse, may be applied to any perfect soul, but especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who being the Mother of Christ according to the flesh, is also the Spouse of God according to the spirit, and occupies the first place amongst all the members of the

Church, which is the Spouse of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he continues, we may explain those words in this sense: that many virgins shall be brought to Christ after the Mother of God; and that her neighbours, those namely who have drawn near unto her by the imitation of her virginity, shall be brought to the marriage-feast of the same Spouse and King, Jesus Christ.

Not only did Moses' sister foreshadow the Blessed Virgin by some striking events of her life, but she moreover bore the same name. Both Jesus and Mary were announced and pre-figured by many persons in whom their great characteristics were represented, and by some who were called by their name. Thus, Pharaoh changed the name of Joseph into that of 'Saviour of the world.' The Israelites were led into the land of promise by Josue (or Jesus). Mary also, the Mother of God, is pre-figured by the sister of Moses and Aaron, whose name is Mary.

The Masorites spell this name 'Miriam'; the Septuagint, however, Syrus, St. Jerome, and all the ancient authors, write 'Mariam,' which is pronounced in two syllables—Mar-iam. But the Greeks and Latins pronounce it as a word of three syllables. From its derivation

the word has several meanings, which have been explained by many saints.

The name of Mary, or Mariam, means 'a sea of bitterness.' 'We must then first consider,' says St. Bonaventure, 'that Mary is called a sea on account of the abundance of her graces. It is written in Ecclesiastes that "all the rivers run into the sea." The rivers represent the gifts of the Holy Ghost; and as all the rivers run into the sea, so all the gifts and graces of the saints are gathered together in Mary. She possesses the graces of the Angels, of the Patriarchs, of the Prophets, of the Apostles, of the Martyrs, of the Confessors, and of the Virgins; and she may properly say with Ecclesiasticus: "In me is all grace of the way and the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue." What wonder that all the graces flow into Mary, considering the excellence of the grace which we all have received through her, as St. Augustine says: 'O Mary, thou art full of grace: thou hast found grace with God, and thou hast spread it all over the world.'

Mary, that sea of grace, was also, according to the interpretation of her name, a sea of bitterness. 'Iam,' as St. Jerome says, means 'a sea,' and 'Mar' is 'bitter,' as we find written in the Book of Ruth: 'Call me not Noemi,

that is beautiful, but call me Mara, that is bitter, for the Almighty hath quite filled me with bitterness.' Mary was like a sea of bitterness, in which all the rivers of affliction, all the causes of sorrow were gathered together. She was a bitter sea when holy Simeon foretold her that a sword would pierce her soul; when Herod sought to kill her Divine Child, and she had to fly into Egypt; when she sought her Son sorrowing for three days; when she met Him carrying His cross; and especially when she saw Him dying on Calvary; when she received His dead Body in her arms, and followed it to its last resting-place.

Noemi was filled with grief and bitterness because of the death of her two sons. Noemi, beautiful and bitter, represents Mary, beautiful by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and filled with bitterness on account of the sufferings of her Divine Son, or rather, because of the death of both her children; for she is not only the Mother of Jesus, but our Mother also. Both, as St. Anselm remarks, died—the one in the body, the other in the soul; Jesus corporally by His sufferings, we spiritually by our sins. 'O sea of bitterness, Queen of martyrs, Mother of sorrow, as well as of grace, by the immensity of thy grief give us a share in thy compassion for

Jesus, thy Divine Son! Make us drink from the chalice of His sufferings; and be thou our guide on the bitter sea of this world!

The name of Mary also means 'Star of the Sea,' according to St. Jerome, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and many others. 'The world,' says St. Ildefonse, 'is a sea, and our Blessed Lady is a star, from which has sprung Jesus, Who enlightens the whole universe.' And St. Thomas writes: 'Mary is the star of the sea; for as the sailors are guided to the port by a star, so the faithful are led to glory by Mary' (Opusc. viii.). St. Ambrose also testifies that Mary is properly interpreted 'Star of the Sea,' for she shines like a bright star in the heavens, and to this star those who are sailing on the sea must constantly lift up their eyes. The voice of the Church confirms this interpretation, for in the Holy Office we sing: 'Ave maris Stella!'—'Hail, Star of the sea!'

This holy name also means 'Lady,' or 'Mistress.' And very properly; for as the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of the Creator and Redeemer of the whole world, she is entitled to the greatest honour after God; and by her Maternity, she has acquired a sort of right over the kingdom of her Divine Son.

Mary, as St. Bonaventure remarks, is the

Lady and Mistress of all created things, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. She is the Lady and Queen of Angels, as she is also called in her Litanies, because all the Angels obey her commands, and consider it a great favour to receive orders from her. On this subject, St. Augustine speaks as follows: 'Michael, the Leader and Prince of the whole heavenly host, and all the celestial spirits, execute thy orders, O Blessed Lady, by defending in life, and receiving at the hour of death the souls of the faithful, especially of those who recommend themselves to thee day and night!'

Mary is the Lady and Mistress of the inhabitants of the earth. We are bought with a great price, namely, the Body and Blood of Jesus. The Blessed Virgin has furnished this price, since Jesus is her Son. Hence, Mary has acquired the title of Mistress of the human race. Let us, therefore, be her faithful servants; for, as St. Bernard remarks, 'God gives us nothing, but through Mary's hands.' Let us also, in return, offer to God, through the same pure hands, whatever good we do. 'What a blessing it is for us,' exclaims St. Bonaventure, 'to have a Mistress who is so generous in our behalf, and who has so much power with her Son, that we may securely fly to her!'

Mary is moreover the Mistress of the infernal spirits, on account of the great power she has over them. She alone of all creatures was never their slave. The devils tremble at the very mention of her sweet name! and at her approach the hellish foe is put to flight. Let us, then, frequently ask this mighty Lady and Mistress to protect us against our infernal enemies.

As a proof of the sweetness of the holy name of Mary, Cæsarius relates that near the church of St. Severinus at Cologne, there lived a saintly recluse, named Marsilius, who had formerly been bishop in Tuscany. He was visited in his solitude by devout persons, who sought his spiritual advice in the direction of their conscience. One day a lady came to him, and told him that she never mentioned our Lady's name without experiencing a wonderful sweetness. He asked her what she thought to be the cause of this singular favour. She answered: 'I salute the Mother of God every day fifty times with the *Hail Mary*, and to this practice I attribute that, whilst I recite those prayers, my mouth is, as it were, filled with the sweetness of honey.'

Marsilius thought he could do no better

than to imitate this lady in her pious practice ; and he began to pray to the Blessed Virgin in the same manner. And when he had persevered in this devotion for six weeks, he was similarly favoured, and the Mother of God filled his mouth also with sweetness, whenever he pronounced her holy name, in the Angel's most sweet salutation.



XI.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

'Arcam de lignis setim compingite . . . et deaurabis eam auro mundissimo intus et foris.'—EXOD. xxv.

'Frame an ark of setim-wood, and thou shalt overlay it with the purest gold within and without.'

GOD commanded Moses to make a precious ark, which was to be placed in the Holy of Holies, after the model He showed him. This ark was a chest made of incorruptible wood, and plated with the purest gold both within and without. It had a golden crown round about, and a cover also of solid gold, which was called the 'Propitiatory,' or 'Mercy-seat.' Two golden cherubim, placed one on either side of the Propitiatory, with their wings extended, covered the ark, and formed as it were a throne for the God of all sanctity and majesty. Hence comes the expression which we often

meet with in Holy Scripture, of God sitting upon the cherubim. This ark was considered by the Israelites as their most precious and glorious treasure; it contained the tables of the Law, and hence it was called 'Ark of the Covenant,' or 'of testimony,' which names are frequently given to the Law itself in Holy Writ.

Mary is the ark of the New Testament, the sacred ark of the Living God, as St. John Damascene calls her. This ark was not only made at God's command, but was in a special manner the work of His own hands, and His masterpiece. As the ark of old was made of incorruptible wood, so Mary was free from the corruption of sin, both by her Immaculate Conception, and also by a special privilege which God granted her so as to preserve her from all contagion of actual sin.

And as she was free from the corruption of sin, by which all the children of Adam are infected, as it is written: 'No one is clean of filthiness, not even an infant who hath lived one day on earth';* so she was also free from the corruption of the tomb: for after her precious death, not only her soul,

* Job xvi., secundum 70.—Note to the first Sermon of St. Leo on the Nativity.

but also her most pure body was assumed into heaven.

The ark was covered with the purest gold, both within and without. In this gold we may see a figure of Mary's virtues; virtues so eminent, that, as St. Bernard remarks, although at first sight other Saints appear to have possessed them in common with the Blessed Virgin, yet, if we consider them attentively, we will perceive that the Mother of God possessed them in a singular manner, and in the highest degree of perfection. In the Saints some or other virtue shines forth with more brilliancy than the others; in Mary they are all prominent and conspicuous by their brightness. The virtues have various degrees, and some Saints have reached in their practice a higher degree than others: but Mary attained the summit of perfection in the exercise of every virtue.

In the covering of gold within and without the ark, we may also see a symbol of Mary's golden charity. Interiorly, she was enriched with the most perfect love of God; exteriorly, she shed the lustre of the most tender affection for her neighbour. Within, she endeavoured to please God; she was rapt in contemplation; she had her conversation in

heaven; without she was solicitous concerning the wants of her fellow-creatures; she edified all who approached her, by her incomparable example; and she spread around her the sweet odour of a holy life.

The ark was surmounted by a crown of the purest gold. Mary, the mystical ark, wears a golden crown; and this crown is a symbol of her royal dignity. She has a right to this crown in her quality of daughter of the royal house of David; she has a greater claim to it as being the Mother of the Son of God. Her prerogatives and her exalted position give her a right to this crown as the Queen of the Angels and Saints, and the Mistress of the world. This glorious crown, prepared for her from all eternity, was solemnly placed upon her head by her Divine Son on the glorious day of her Assumption into heaven, as a reward of her virtues, her sufferings, and her sacrifices.

The two cherubim, who covered the ark with their outspread wings, put us in mind of the special care and protection with which God surrounded our Blessed Lady, and the particular vigilance with which He watched over her. If we are all placed under the guardianship of the Angels of God, as the

Psalmist declares : ' He hast given His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways,' how jealously must they have watched over the Blessed Virgin, who, no doubt, was in a special manner entrusted to their care. Assuredly they protected her with a flaming sword, as they guarded Paradise of old, and prevented the enemy from coming near her to do her harm.

By order of God, Moses placed in the ark the two stone tables on which the Law was written. Mary, the mystical ark, contained more than the tables of the Law, for the Lawgiver Himself took up His abode in her, and dwelt in her. She is the blessed and happy Mother of Him Who came, not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it; the Mother of Him Who accomplished all the figures and prophecies of the Old Testament, and perfected all that was imperfect.

We may also add that, as the tables of the Law were kept in the ark, so the Law of God was constantly in the mind and heart of the Blessed Virgin, and the perfection of the practice of the Law appeared in all her actions.

When the people of Israel were about to enter into the promised land, and were ready

to pass over the Jordan, the ark, as God directed, went before them. And no sooner had the feet of the priests who carried the ark, touched the water of the river, than it ceased to flow; and the bed of the Jordan was dried up, and gave a free passage to the Israelites.

So also the stream of sin, which, with its corrupted waters, had infected all the children of Adam, stopped at Mary's approach, and did not touch her. It receded before the living ark of the Lord, and the Blessed Virgin was conceived Immaculate.

The waters of the Jordan, which were divided by the ark of the covenant, also represent the waters of tribulation and affliction, which recede at Mary's coming; so that, with her maternal protection, and under her guidance, her children safely pass over the dangerous and impetuous stream of this world.

The ark of the covenant was to the people of God a source of blessings, and on account of its presence the Lord granted singular favours. Thus we read in the Second Book of Kings that 'The ark of the Lord abode in the house of Obbedom three months: and the Lord blessed Obbedom and all his house-

hold. And it was told King David that the Lord had blessed Obedom, and all that he had, because of the ark of God ' (chap. vi).

The presence of the living ark of the Most High was also to holy Zachary, and his whole house, a source of benediction. It was through His holy Mother that the Incarnate Word granted His first favour in the order of grace, by purifying His precursor, St. John the Baptist. At the first sound of Mary's voice, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost; her child leaped with joy, and was cleansed from original sin. As the ark of old remained three months in the house of Obedom, so the Blessed Virgin abode with Elizabeth about three months. If the effects of Mary's first salutation were so astonishing, what blessings must have descended upon the house of Zachary during her stay!

O most glorious and living ark of the Author of the New and Eternal Testament, Mary, Mother of God, visit thy servants and the followers of thy Son, and dwell in our midst! Grant that thy sweet memory and the love of thee may ever reign in our hearts, until our eyes behold the sublime vision described in the Apocalypse: 'And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and the ark

ing out in the press of the Cross, it
ed all over the earth, as a rain of

first sign which Gedeon obtained,
that the dew was in the fleece only,
fied in the Annunciation, when Mary
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was then spread over the whole earth.
ry,' writes Henry of Clairvaux, 'is the
through whose fecundity the Church
knowledges to receive whatever grace is
ued into her members all over the world;
thus He Who descended like rain upon
fleece, has set His inheritance a
rain.* This of grace and of
ritual blessing enables the barren



XII.

GEDEON'S FLEECE.

'Descendet sicut pluvia in vellus: et sicut stillicidia stillantia super terram.'—Ps. lxxi.

'He shall come down like rain upon the fleece; and as showers falling gently upon the earth.'

THE people of Israel were oppressed by the Madianites on account of their sins. In their affliction they cried to the Lord for help. Gedeon was destined by God to deliver them, and an angel came to instruct him concerning his mission. The enemies having assembled, and camped in the valley of Jezrael, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gedeon, and he sounded the trumpet, and called the Israelites together. And he said to God: 'If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as Thou hast said, I will put this fleece of wool on the floor: if there be dew in the fleece only, and it be dry on all the ground

beside, I shall know that by my hand, as Thou hast said, 'Thou wilt deliver Israel.' And it was so. And rising before day, wringing the fleece, he filled a vessel with the dew.

And he said again to God: 'Let not thy wrath be kindled against me if I try once more, seeking a sign in the fleece. I pray that the fleece only may be dry, and all the ground wet with dew.' And God did that night as he had requested: and it was dry on the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground (Judges vi.).

The fleece of Gedeon and the miracles which happened in it, represent in a striking manner the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the wonders of grace which God wrought in her.

St. Ildefonse remarks that the fleece is a symbol of virginity. 'As the fleece,' he says, 'though belonging to the body, is not subject to the passions of the body, so virginity, existing in the flesh, ignores the vices of the flesh.'*

This sublime virtue is found in Mary in all its perfection, whence she is properly honoured with the title of 'Virgin of virgins,' and called 'the Blessed Virgin.' To live in the flesh as if having no body, is not an earthly, but a heavenly life. To obtain in the body the

* Serm. VI., de Assumpt. B.M.V.

angelic glory, is more meritorious than to have been created a pure spirit. If it is a great happiness to be an angel by nature, it is a greater happiness still to be a virgin by chastity. A virgin endeavours to acquire by grace what an angel possesses by nature. And if in both we must see the goodness and generosity of the Creator of all things, and the Giver of all good gifts, how much ought we to admire His liberality in Mary, whose purity exceeds even that of the heavenly spirits!

Ernest of Prague,* speaking on this subject, says: 'The Blessed Virgin was born, in the ordinary manner of nature, from the tribe of Juda, according to the flesh; yet she did not walk according to the flesh; she entirely ignored the passions of the flesh which reign in our body; and, walking in the spirit, she was altogether impassible, like a fleece, by her admirable patience.'

The learned Cornelius a Lapide explains this figure of our Blessed Lady in the following manner:

In an allegorical sense, the dew in the fleece is Christ in the Blessed Virgin. The dew signified that the Incarnation of the Word of God in our Blessed Lady would be secret,

* In Mariali, cap. 71.

tranquil, chaste, spiritual, fruitful, without corruption of her virginity, and without the sorrow of child-birth. The fleece represented both the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the humanity of Christ conceived in her, in which the Divinity descended as a heavenly dew. Hence St. Ambrose, St. Ephrem, St. Sophronius, Proclus, and others, call and invoke the Mother of God as 'the Fleece of Gedeon.' Listen to St. Ambrose. 'Mary,' says he, 'is properly compared to a fleece, because when she conceived our Lord she drew Him entirely to herself, without losing her virginity; she showed herself tractable, and suited to the dignity, being strong in sanctity.' And St. Jerome: 'The shepherds who were watching at night, heard the words: "Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good-will!" And as they were guarding their sheep, they found the Lamb of God on a clean and spotless fleece, which was moist with heavenly dew, in the midst of the barrenness and dryness of the whole earth.'

St. Bernard speaks in the same sense: 'What is meant by the fleece of Gedeon, which coming from the body, free from the ills of the body, is put on the floor, and first filled with dew, which afterwards covers the ground, but the

human nature which our Saviour took from the Blessed Virgin, without the loss of her virginity? Mary, in whom the fulness of the Divinity descended, when the heavens sent down their dew, in order that we, who are dry and sterile, might receive from her fulness?

And in another place he says: 'Behold, O man, the counsel of God; acknowledge the counsel of wisdom, the counsel of love. Wishing to cover the ground with heavenly dew, He first fills the fleece; wishing to redeem the human race, He first places the price of our redemption in Mary.'

Of this same figure the Church sings in her Office: 'O Lord our God, at Thy wonderful birth from a virgin, the Scriptures were fulfilled: then Thou didst come down like rain upon the fleece, to save the human race.'

The Incarnation, prefigured by the miracle which God wrought in favour of Gedeon, is also alluded to by David in the 71st Psalm, where, speaking of Christ, he says: 'He shall come down like rain upon the fleece; and as showers falling gently upon the earth.' Which St. Peter Chrysologus thus explains: 'The heavenly rain fell gently on the fleece, that is, on Mary; the whole wave of the Divinity was absorbed and hidden in the fleece of humanity,

until, wrung out in the press of the Cross, it was diffused all over the earth, as a rain of salvation.'

The first sign which Gedeon obtained, namely, that the dew was in the fleece only, was verified in the Annunciation, when Mary alone conceived the heavenly dew, Jesus Christ. For the sake of this dew, and through this dew, Mary was truly blessed; hence the Angel calls her 'Blessed among women,' and salutes her as 'full of grace.' 'She is rightly described as being full of grace,' remarks St. Jerome; 'for to others it is distributed in portions, but the fulness of grace is infused into Mary; therefore she is blessed above all other women.'

The second sign was fulfilled when Christ was born of the Blessed Virgin, for the heavenly dew was then spread over the whole earth. 'Mary,' writes Henry of Clairvaux, 'is the fleece through whose fecundity the Church acknowledges to receive whatever grace is infused into her members all over the world; and thus He Who descended like rain upon the fleece, has set aside for His inheritance a free rain.* This is the rain of grace and of spiritual blessings, which enables the barren

* Psalm lxvii. 10.

soil of our hearts to bring forth fruits of salvation and of life everlasting.

Gedeon asked for a sign in the fleece when he was going to wage war with his enemies. We also have to fight; our life is a conflict. If we wish to be victorious in this long and severe struggle, let us seek a sign in the fleece; let us combat under Mary's banner; a sincere and constant devotion to the Mother of God will be for us the pledge of victory.



XIII.

ABIGAIL.

'Ecce famula tua sit in ancillam, ut lavet pedes servorum domini mei.'—1 REG. xxv. 41.

'Behold, let thy servant be a handmaid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.'

SAUL had been rejected by the Lord, because of his disobedience; and David had been chosen to fill his place. In order to avoid the effects of the king's envy, David had frequently to hide himself, and to flee from place to place, for he knew that Saul was bent upon killing him. One day he went down into the wilderness of Pharan. In the neighbourhood there lived a man called Nabal, who was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats; and his possessions were in Carmel, where he was then shearing his sheep. He was churlish, and ill-natured; but his wife, whose name was

Abigail, was a prudent and very comely woman.

When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he sent ten young men, saying : ' Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and salute him in my name with peace, and say : Peace be to my brethren, and to thee, and peace to thy house, and peace to all that thou hast. I heard that thy shepherds, who were with us in the desert, were shearing : we never molested them, neither was there aught missing to them of the flock at any time all the while they were with us in Carmel. Now therefore let thy servants find favour in thy eyes ; whatsoever thy hand shall find, give to thy servants, and to thy son David.' And when David's servants came, they spoke to Nabal all these words in David's name, and then held their peace.

But Nabal, answering, exclaimed : ' Who is David ? And what is the son of Isai ? Shall I take my bread, and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are ?'

The servants of David returned, and told him what had occurred. Then David said to his young men : ' Let every man gird on his

sword.' And about four hundred men followed him. But one of the servants told Abigail, the wife of Nabal, saying: 'Behold David sent messengers out of the wilderness, to salute our master; and he rejected them. These men were very good to us, and gave us no trouble; neither did we ever lose anything all the time that we conversed with them in the desert. They were a wall unto us both by night and day. Wherefore consider, and think what thou hast to do: for evil is determined against thy husband, and against thy house.'

Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two vessels of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of dry figs. And she said to her servants: 'Go before me: behold, I will follow after you.' And as she was coming down to the foot of the mountain, David and his men came down over against her. When Abigail saw David, she made haste, and fell at his feet, saying: 'Upon me let this iniquity be, my lord: let thy handmaid speak, I beseech, in thy ears: and hear the words of thy servant. Let not my lord the king, I pray, regard this naughty

man Nabal; for according to his name, he is a fool, and folly is with him: but I thy handmaid did not see thy servants, my lord, whom thou sentest. Wherefore receive this blessing, which thy handmaid hath brought to thee, and give it to the young men that follow thee, my lord.'

And David said to Abigail: 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, Who sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy speech; and blessed be thou, who hast kept me to-day from coming to blood, and revenging me with my own hand.' Then he received at her hand all that she had brought him, and said: 'Go in peace into thy house; behold I have heard thy voice, and have honoured thy face.'

The Blessed Virgin Mary is prefigured by the prudent and comely Abigail, who succeeded in appeasing the wrath of David against Nabal. David represents the Lord, and Nabal the sinner; and who is Abigail but Mary, the Mother of mercy, the Advocate of sinners, who turns away from us the just anger of an offended God, by her pious prayers ?*

Nabal and his house were threatened with

* Bellarmine, *super Missus*, conc. 2.

destruction. God also threatens the sinners and admonishes them with the words of the Psalmist: 'Except you will be converted, He will brandish His sword: He hath bent His bow, and made it ready; and in it He hath prepared the instruments of death' (Ps. vii.). How often has Mary, the true Abigail, stayed the arm of God's justice; and, like the high-priest Aaron, 'by her intercession withstood the wrath, and put an end to the calamity, and cut off the way to the living!' (Wisdom xviii.).

St. Bonaventure* applies the similitude of this historical incident in the same manner, and explains it as follows: We rightly call Mary 'blessed,' because through her God becomes propitious to man. This is illustrated in Abigail, of whom we read that, when David in his anger wanted to kill the churlish Nabal, she went to meet him, and pacified him. And David, being appeased, said to her: 'Blessed be thy speech, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me to-day from coming to blood, and revenging me with my own hand.' Nabal, whose name means 'fool,' represents the sinner: for, in a certain sense, every sinner is a fool. And, alas! as Ecclesiastes says, the

* Speculum B.M.V., xiv.

number of fools is infinite (Eccles. i. 15). The Blessed Virgin is represented by Abigail, which means 'The Father's joy.' The heavenly Father rejoiced in Mary, and Mary rejoiced in Him, as she declares, saying: 'And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.'

As Abigail represents our Blessed Lady, so David is a figure of our Lord. As David was angry with the churlish Nabal, so God's wrath is kindled against the sinner. David was appeased by Abigail, and God becomes favourable to the sinner through Mary. The gentle words and the presents of Abigail softened David's heart; the sweet prayers and abundant merits of Mary have a powerful influence upon the heart of her Divine Son. Abigail succeeded in averting temporal punishment; but Mary delivers us from eternal evils. The former caused the human sword to be sheathed; the latter disarms the hand of God. Hence St. Bernard properly exclaims: 'No one, O Lady, is so well able to keep back the sword of Divine justice as thou, through whom we have first obtained mercy at the hands of the Lord, and who art most pleasing in His sight!'

Mary, however, effects much more by her prayers than Abigail did. Abigail, indeed,

appeased David, but she did not succeed in making him love Nabal. Whereas our Blessed Lady not only turns away God's anger from us, but moreover, through her intercession, we become acceptable to the Divine majesty.

There is another striking resemblance between Abigail and the Blessed Virgin, in the manner in which both declare their humility, calling themselves handmaids. This resemblance is beautifully described by St. Bonaventure, in the following terms :

O truly admirable humility of Mary ! She is not only, as she calls herself, the handmaid of the Lord, but she also deigns to be the handmaid of the servants of the Lord. She is represented by Abigail, who, when David sent messengers to her, to invite her into his house, replied : ' Behold, let thy servant be a handmaid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.' The blessed handmaid, Mary, washes the feet of as many servants of the Lord, as there are sinners that are cleansed through her intercession. She procures water to wash the feet of the servants when she obtains for the sinners the tears of true repentance.

Let us say to the Mother of God with the same saint :

Mary Foreshadowed.

*Tu es Abigail sapiens,
David deferens munera,
Nabal et David faciens
Precibus tuis fœdera.*

*Dum pia lactis ubera
Christo dedisti nutriens :
Hinc peccatoris scelera
Tuis meritis leniens.*

Thou art the wise Abigail
To David offering presents rare ;
Nabal and David thou dost still
Oft reconcile by thy kind prayer.

Thou, Mary, tenderly didst nurse
God's Son come from His glory-seat :
Hence thou canst change the bitter curse
Of sinners into blessings sweet.



XIV.

THE TOWER OF DAVID.

'Sicut turris David, quæ ædificata est cum propugnaculis : mille clypei pendent ex ea.'—CANT. iv. 4.

'As the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks : a thousand bucklers hang upon it.'

THE virtuous and valiant King David, having triumphed over all his enemies, caused a very strong tower or fortress to be erected, with bulwarks, in order that from this stronghold all attacks against the city of Jerusalem might be resisted. It was amply provided with bucklers, and other weapons, which were at that time used in warfare. This tower or citadel stood near the gate of Bethlehem ; and on its site a new fortress was afterwards erected, which continued to be called the Tower of David.*

° Dom Calmet, ed. Migne.

Mary is properly called the Tower of David, for Christ, the true David, built this spiritual fortress, and made her as a tower of strength. He armed her with thousands of bucklers and shields, with all the armour of the valiant ones. Moreover, He preserved her from all the assaults of the enemy, and made her so solid and secure in virtue, that the hellish foe never durst attack her.

Mary is not only a tower, but the Tower of David, because she belonged to the royal family of David. She is the tower of the true David, of Whom the first David was but a type, of that ever blessed Son of David, Who, coming to defeat the infernal Goliath, took His weapons from this tower, namely His precious Body and Blood, which He offered on the Cross to His heavenly Father, as the price of our Redemption.

The Blessed Virgin is a tower because of her elevation. As a tower rises above the other buildings, so our Blessed Lady rose above all earthly things by her sublime contemplation. We are elevated above this world, when we meditate on heaven, and contemplate the infinite majesty of God. But what creature ever practised these holy exercises in that degree of perfection to which

Mary attained. Our weak endeavours cannot be successful without God's assistance ; and if we do what lies in our power, our progress will depend on the measure of heavenly aid. But what creature was ever instructed by the Most High, and drawn towards Him in these holy exercises, as Mary was ?

The result of our elevation in prayer and meditation is contempt of the world, and the love of the goods of heaven. Thus our Blessed Lady, in consequence of her sublime gift of contemplation, was elevated like a tower in all her thoughts, desires, and intentions. And although, being like a tower, her foundations were in the earth, as she was here in the body, her conversation, to use the words of St. Paul, was in heaven.

Mary is also compared to a tower because of her strength. Towers are made strong in order that they may withstand the attacks and efforts of the enemy. Was there ever a tower stronger than Mary ? She was truly strong, because her strength was in and from the Lord. So great was the abundance of grace with which God strengthened her, that she was never weakened in the practice of virtue and perfection. She was so strong that she never knew what danger was. And what is

it that shows us our weakness but temptation, and the danger of sin? When are we conquered but when we yield to the enemies of our soul? In Mary there never was even a shadow of sin. She was therefore strong indeed. We are weak because we trust in ourselves: the Blessed Virgin was strong because she relied on God.

Towers are destined to the defence of a place. They are constructed in order that by their means the enemy may be checked, and driven back. Mary is a tower of defence to us, for she has been given us in a special manner as a Mother, a Patroness, and an Advocate; and hence she will protect and defend her children efficaciously, with true maternal care and affection. She will obtain for us the help of Divine grace in all temptations, and at our last hour she will assist us; she will especially then defend us against the devil, our greatest enemy, and will lead us to our eternal home.

The Church teaches us to seek refuge in this mystical tower, and to implore her assistance, saying:

*'Tu nos ab hoste protege,
Et mortis hora suscipe.'*

'Protect us from our enemies during this earthly
strife;
And guard our soul, O Mother dear, at the close
of our life!'

A tower is also a place of refuge for the combatants; in the fortress they are safe and secure. The Blessed Virgin is our tower of refuge. We are combatants, and we have to fight against powerful and cruel enemies. In the Mother of God we shall find protection; in this tower we shall be secure; Mary, our Mother, will shield us.

‘Mary,’ says Albertus Magnus, ‘is compared to the tower of David, because she is the refuge of the faithful. A thousand bucklers, that is, the assistance of the holy Angels, hang upon it, for the defence of all who fly to her. This tower also contains all the armour of valiant men, because all the saints will help those to whom Mary will show favour.’

To the poor sinner especially, Mary is a tower of refuge. The sinner is pursued, not by an earthly enemy, but by an avenging God. How can he escape? Whither shall he fly from the All-seeing eye, from the Almighty hand? Where shall he be sheltered from the wrath of the Most High? Let him hasten to the tower of David; there he will be safe. Let him fly to Mary; she will protect and screen him. ‘The name of Mary,’ says Richard of St. Laurence, ‘is a strong

tower ; if the sinner runs to her, he shall be saved.'

St. Thomas of Villanova speaks in the same sense, saying : ' This tower is the bulwark of the Church, and the sole refuge of sinners. Let, therefore, all the criminals, all the weak, all the afflicted come to Mary ; she will protect them, and deliver them from their enemies. O Christians, in all your tribulations, come to Mary ! If you are laden with sins, if crushed by trials, if troubled by temptations, run to this tower, fly to Mary !'

Raymund Jordanus (or Idiota) addresses Mary in the following terms : ' As a tower is the protection and defence of a city, so thou, O Virgin most prudent, art the protection and defence of poor sinners, who in all their needs and straits must have recourse to this unconquerable tower, crying : " We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God !" Thou, O Blessed Virgin Mary, art a tower, defending the poor, the humble, the lovers of peace and concord ! Thou art the tower which the Lord has built in the midst of His vineyard (Matt. xxi.), that is, for the defence of the whole Catholic Church.'

The holy doctor St. Alphonsus makes a beautiful comparison between the tower of

David and pious Confraternities, especially those of the Blessed Virgin. He remarks that St. Francis of Sales constantly exhorted the faithful to enter into some sodality or congregation; and St. Charles Borromeo recommended the confessors to induce their penitents to become members of one of these associations. 'A Confraternity,' writes St. Alphonsus, 'may be called the tower of David. A thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men. The reason of the great advantages of sodalities (especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary) is, that the members have many weapons of defence against hell, and that the means of preserving the soul in grace are adopted in confraternities, but neglected by those who do not belong to them.'

Of Mary, the spiritual Tower of David, the Church sings on the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians:

*Tollit ut sancta caput in Sione
Turris, arx, firmo fabricata muro,
Alta Davidis, clypeis et acris
Milite tuta.*

*Virgo sic fortis Domini potenti
Dextera, cœli cumulata donis,
A piis longe famulis repelle
Dæmonis ictus.*

Thou, Mary, art the noble tower
Which David did in Sion build ;
The fortress high, and strong in power,
With shields, and arms for warfare filled,
O mighty Virgin, rich in grace,
Made strong by God, all free from woe,
Our hope and trust in thee we place :
Protect us from the hellish foe !



XV.

SOLOMON'S THRONE.

'Fecit etiam rex Salomon thronum de ebore grandem, et vestivit eum auro fulvo nimis.'—3 REG. x.

'King Solomon also made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold.'

KING SOLOMON, as we read in the third Book of Kings, made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold. It had six steps: and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were two hands on either side holding the seat: and two lions stood, one at each hand. And twelve little lions stood upon the six steps on the one side and on the other: there was no such work made in any kingdom.

Blessed Albertus Magnus paraphrases this description, applying it to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the following words:

'King Solomon made a throne, to wit the

glorious Virgin, in the time of grace, when the Mother of mercy appeared in the world. He made the throne of the *ivory* of chastity and innocence. He made it *great*, in nature, in grace, in glory, in mercy, in humility, in goodness, in generosity, in beauty. He *overlaid it* entirely, royally, more than any other creature, *with the finest gold* of charity. *It had six steps*: the first is humility, the second virginity, the third poverty, the fourth modesty, the fifth patience, the sixth temperance. *The top of the throne was round* by the hope of heavenly things. *And two hands holding the seat*, which is Mary, by fear and reverence. The Blessed Virgin had towards Jesus sentiments full of fear and reverence; for although He was her Son, He was, nevertheless, her Lord and God. *There was no such work made*, no work so wonderful, so useful, so precious, so beautiful, *in any kingdom* in heaven or on earth.*

On Solomon's throne sat the wisest of kings. But on this sublime and living throne, Mary, He sat Who gives wisdom and power to the kings, the Eternal Wisdom; whence the Church properly calls the Blessed Virgin 'Seat of Wisdom.'

* In Bibl. Marian.

Many learned and pious authors have made various reflections on the description which Holy Scripture gives of Solomon's throne. The following lines contain some of their considerations on the subject, taken chiefly from the writings of St. Peter Damian.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the throne of Solomon, which is interpreted Peaceable, for the King of Peace rested in her. In this throne, in Mary, sat the Eternal King, Who, being in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant (Philippians ii.). The son of David is called by three different names in Holy Scripture: Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Idida (Jedidia). The first means Peaceable, the second Preacher, the third Beloved. The throne, however, is ascribed not to the Preacher, nor to the Beloved, but to the Peaceable King; because Christ came to restore all things in heaven and on earth, and to establish peace between God and man, through the instrumentality of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

'Our Blessed Lady is the throne of God,' says Peter of Blois; 'but not a throne from which He sends His thunder-bolts, not a throne from which He promulgates the sentences of death, and the decrees of eternal

damnation; but a throne from which He exercises a peaceful dominion; a throne from which Mary's Son, Jesus, grants, through the prayers and merits of His Blessed Mother, forgiveness to the criminals, freedom to the captives, light to the blind, rest to the weary, health to the sick, relief to the poor, security to the timid, fidelity among friends, peace between enemies, certitude in doubt, truth in error, solace in affliction, rescue in warfare, refuge in exile, a haven in shipwreck, wisdom to the ignorant, exaltation to the humble, grace to those who begin and advance, and to those who persevere and triumph glory and an eternal crown.'

Mary is a throne of ivory. Why is the praise of ivory put before that of all other precious materials? Ivory alone is the substance from which so excellent and beautiful a throne could be made, that there was no such work in any kingdom. Ivory is white, hard, and cold. And what can be whiter than that virginity, purity, and innocence, which filled the Angels with admiration? What can be found stronger than she, through whom the Lord overcame the strong one, and took away all his arms wherein he trusted? (Luke xi.). What can be found cooler than she, whom

the power of the Most High overshadowed, and who was never infected by the heat of sin or passion? As ivory is bone without flesh, so Mary lived in the body as having no body. As ivory is bone without skin, so Mary despised all exterior things, namely, the world and its vanities. As ivory is bone without hair, so Mary deprived herself of all superfluities, by the love of poverty.

Mary is a great throne, a throne of vast dimensions, for in her dwelt that God Whom the heavens cannot contain. A throne great also in dignity; for the dignity of the Mother of God far exceeds even that of the angelic spirits. Whatever is great among creatures is less than Mary: she is surpassed only by the Creator.

The Blessed Virgin is a throne covered with the finest gold. Gold is the most precious of all metals, and represents charity, which is the greatest of all virtues. So brightly did the fire of the love of God burn in Mary, that St. Ildefonse calls her 'A throne resplendent with the colour of fire.' Well could the Blessed Virgin say with Isaias: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation,

and with the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bride adorned with her jewels (Isaias lxi.).

The throne had six steps. Learn to meditate on holy subjects, 'for perverse thoughts separate from God' (Wisdom i), and you have ascended the first step. Accustom your tongue to speak of holy and edifying things, and you have ascended the second. Do that which is right and just, and you have ascended the third. Teach those that err the ways of the Lord, and console the afflicted, and you have ascended the fourth. Leave the world, and all that is in the world, and you have ascended the fifth. Persevere in your holy undertakings, and you have reached the sixth step; and you may aspire to the contemplation of the Queen of heaven in her glory.

The top of the throne was round; and this may be considered as a symbol of our Lady's Assumption. For as in a round line there is no end, so the glory into which the Mother of God entered when she was taken up into heaven will have no end.

Twelve little lions stood upon the steps. These represent the twelve Apostles, who, ascending by the steps as we have described, con-

template the Queen of heaven with the greatest admiration and joy. The two hands holding the seat are the active and the contemplative life, which held the Virgin Mother in such a perfect and wonderful manner, that her exterior occupations were no hindrance to contemplation, and that she lived in contemplation without omitting any necessary or useful work; so that she could say, as it is written in the Canticle: 'His left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me.'

The two lions standing one at each hand, may be taken as figures of the Archangel Gabriel and St. John the Evangelist. The first stood at her right, the second at her left hand; for Gabriel watched over Mary's soul, St. John over her body. They are properly compared to lions, on account of the roaring sound of their voices. The Archangel says: 'Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee!' The Evangelist records the memorable words which he heard from Jesus' lips: 'Behold Thy Mother!'

'There was no such work made in any kingdom.' No assertion is more true, more sublime, more consoling to us poor sinners. For although God has produced many great and wonderful creatures, there is not among

the works of His hands anything so excellent or magnificent as the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Let us then go with confidence to the throne of grace, to Mary full of grace, to the Mother of divine grace, that through her we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.

*Tu thronus es Salomonis,
Cui nullus par in thronis,
Arte vel materia.*

*Ebur candens castitatis,
Aurum fulvum charitatis,
Præsignant mysteria.*

ADAM DE S. VICTORE.

Thou art Solomon's great throne,
Like to which there is found none,
In material or art.

Ivory and finest gold
Show thy purity untold,
And the love which filled thy heart.



XVI.

SOLOMON'S MOTHER.

'Pete, mater mea : neque enim fas est ut avertam faciem tuam.'—3 REG. ii.

'My mother, ask : for I must not turn away thy face.'

IT is related in the third Book of Kings that one day Solomon's mother came to him, to make a request. The king, seeing her, arose to meet her, and bowed to her, and then sat down upon his throne. A throne was also set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand. Then she said to him : 'I desire one small petition of thee, do not put me to confusion.' And the king replied : 'My mother, ask : for I must not turn away thy face.'

Nature has put in our hearts sentiments of affection and regard towards those whom it has pleased God to give us for parents. The

Author of nature gives us an express command to the same effect: 'Honour thy father and mother.' Solomon fulfilled this precept in an excellent manner, when, being exalted to the throne of David his father, he ordered a throne to be set for his mother on his right hand, and spoke to her these words full of veneration and love: 'My mother, ask: for I must not turn away thy face.'

In the marks of filial affection which Solomon showed towards his mother, we may see a reflection of the sentiments with which the true Solomon, He Who describes Himself as 'more than Solomon' (Luke xi.), is animated towards His most holy Mother, the best of mothers. By her title of 'Mother,' our Blessed Lady has a special claim on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our dear Saviour is undoubtedly the most perfect model of all virtues. Now, if here on earth He was, as the Gospel declares, subject to Mary, how could we imagine that in heaven He will disregard her petitions? Assuredly, the power of the Mother of God is much greater now than it was during her mortal life. Jesus has honoured her even as Solomon honoured his mother; He has set a throne for her on the glorious day of her Assumption and she sits

at the right hand of her beloved Son : 'The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing' (Ps. xlv).

Mary, being thus exalted as Queen of heaven and earth, has a power which no other saint possesses. Her power has, in a certain sense, no other limits than the power of God Himself. Not that she has this power from her own self, like God : her power is a power of supplication—that is, that she can obtain what she desires by asking God for it. This power, however, is so great, that it is frequently, and very properly, called 'Omnipotentia supplex,' that is, 'a suppliant, or entreating omnipotence.'

Not only is the prayer of our Blessed Lady more powerful than that of any other saint, but, as Suarez says, it has an efficacy greater than the prayers of all the saints taken together. For the prayers of the saints, as St. Antonine remarks, have no efficacy from themselves ; they depend solely upon God's goodness. But Mary has a sort of right to obtain what she asks ; for a son must not only listen to his mother, he must also obey her. Whence St. Ambrose says : 'It is impossible that the prayers of many, that is, of the saints, be not heard ; but even if they were not heard, the

Son would nevertheless graciously hear His mother.'

It is the common sentiment of the holy Fathers, that Mary is all-powerful in obtaining what she desires. St. Peter Damian, addressing the Mother of God, says: 'He that is mighty hath done great things to thee, and all power is given to thee in heaven and on earth, and nothing is impossible to thee, for thou canst restore the hope of salvation even to those who have fallen into despair.' And St. Bonaventure: 'He that is mighty hath done great things to thee: the Most Mighty is with thee, and thou art most mighty with Him, and through Him.'

If Mary's power is so great, it is but natural that she should exercise it. Adonias wishing to obtain a favour from Solomon, went to his mother, and asked her to intercede for him. Why then should we, poor sinners, not go to the Mother of God, in order that she may intercede for us? The comparison of the mother of Solomon, who was king of Israel, with the Blessed Virgin, is, however, very imperfect: first, because the power and the riches of earthly kings have a limit, and therefore they cannot always grant the favours that are asked, even if they should wish to do so;

secondly, an earthly intercessor, however good his intentions may be, is liable to ask what is opposed to the king's interests, or displeasing to him. On the contrary, when Mary pleads in our behalf, we know that she cannot ask too much, since there is no end to the power and riches of God ; and, moreover, she will not ask anything contrary to God's Holy Will ; and hence her request is always pleasing to Him.

It is an undoubted truth that we cannot go to the Father but by Jesus Christ. If, however, we wish to be graciously received by the Son, we can, as St Bernard says, find no better Mediatrix than His beloved Mother. If then, he adds, we seek grace, let us seek it through Mary.

Is it not natural for us to seek favours by the channel through which they must come to us ? Now the Saints assure us that God distributes no graces except by Mary's hands. Thus St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, exclaims : ' No one is saved but through thee, O Virgin most holy ; no one is delivered from evil but through thee, O Virgin most pure ; no one obtains mercy but through thee, O Virgin most chaste ! ' And St. Bernard : ' Let us with our whole heart, and with all

our affections, and with all our desires, venerate the Mother of God, for such is the Will of Him Who was pleased to give us all things through Mary.' And St. Bernardine of Siena assures us that 'Through the hands of the Blessed Virgin are distributed all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to whomsoever she pleases, when she pleases, as she pleases, and as much as she pleases.'

The efficacy of Mary's intercession is commemorated in various prayers, by this expression: 'Hear us, O Mary, for thy Son can refuse thee nothing.' It occurs in the sequence '*Ave præclara maris stella*' (Hail thou bright star of the sea), composed by Hermannus Contractus; and when one day those words of the hymn were being sung by the nuns at Sconauge, the Abbess, St. Elizabeth, was favoured with a heavenly vision of our Blessed Lady. The same expression is also found in the antiphon '*Stella cæli extirpavit*' (A star of heaven has destroyed), which is said to have had a miraculous origin in a convent of the Order of St. Clare in Portugal.

The same truth is illustrated by the following example, which is related by Cesarius.

About the year 1220, there lived at Floreffe

in the diocese of Liege a young nobleman, who, after his father's death, foolishly squandered his ample inheritance. His lands and goods, with which he had gradually to part, were mostly acquired by a neighbour, who was also very rich. Having at length come to the brink of poverty, he resolved to go to a strange country, and beg his bread where he would be unknown. He had a steward, a wicked man, and instrument of Satan, who, seeing his fallen countenance, and well knowing the cause, said to him: 'Master, wouldst thou like to be rich again?' 'Very much,' was the answer, 'if I could have riches together with God.' 'Fear not,' replied the steward; 'come with me, and all will be right.'

At night he took the young man to a wood, and there he began to speak to a person unseen. 'To whom art thou speaking?' inquired the young man. 'What does it matter to thee?' said the steward; 'be silent.' On being asked a second time, however, he answered: 'I am speaking to the devil.' The nobleman, horrified, heard the steward address Satan in this manner: 'I have brought my master to thee, in order that by thy help he may be restored to his former wealth and

honour.' 'His desire shall be fulfilled,' said the devil; 'but he must first renounce God.' The young man refused at first, but, persuaded by the wicked steward, he renounced his Creator. 'One thing more is required,' added the devil; 'he must also renounce the Mother of God.' This the nobleman would not do; and to the suggestions of the steward, he replied: 'I will never renounce the Mother of God, even if I had to beg my bread all my life.'

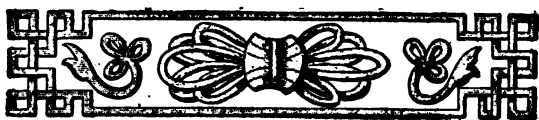
Thereupon they together left the spot. At dawn of day they came to a church, and seeing the door open, the young man came down from his horse, and left it to the steward's keeping, saying: 'Wait here until I return.' Having entered the church, he prostrated himself before the altar, on which was an image of our Blessed Lady, representing her seated, and holding the Divine Child in her lap. And as he invoked the Mother of God, his conscience awoke, and he began to see the grievousness of his sin. So great was the contrition which the Lord gave him for the sake of His Mother, whom he had not renounced, that he began to weep and to sigh, and filled the church with his cries.

It so happened that the rich neighbour, who

had acquired mostly all his goods, entered the church at that moment; and seeing the young nobleman in such a plight, thought that he was bewailing his misery, and hid himself behind a pillar. In the hearing of both, Mary spoke through her image, and addressed her Divine Son, saying: 'My dearest Son, have pity on this man.' The Child answered not, but turned His face away from her. When Mary reiterated her request, pleading that the man had been deceived, the Child turned His back to the Blessed Virgin, adding: 'This man has renounced Me; what can I do for him now?' Thereupon our Blessed Lady arose, placed her Son upon the altar, and said: 'I pray thee, my beloved Son, that for my sake thou wouldst graciously pardon him.' Then the Divine Child, lifting up His Mother, replied: 'Mother, I can refuse thee nothing; behold, for thy sake, I forgive him all.'

After a while, as the young man went out, the rich neighbour followed him; and feigning to appear surprised, asked him why his eyes were so red and swollen. As the nobleman, full of confusion, did not know what to answer, he told him that he was in the church, and had heard and seen everything. And the occurrence had so moved his heart, that he

promised to give him back all his goods ; he, moreover, offered him the hand of his only daughter, and said he would make him his heir. All the parties concerned having given their consent, the rich man immediately fulfilled his promise, and was ever grateful to God for the happy results of the resolution he had made, when witnessing the miraculous conversion of the young nobleman before our Lady's altar.



XVII.

THE HOUSE OF WISDOM.

'O Israel, quam magna est domus Dei.'—BARUCH
iii.

'O Israel, how great is the house of God !'

IN the Book of Proverbs, 9th chapter, we read as follows : ' Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven pillars.'

' Wisdom ' may here be said to mean God Himself, or Jesus Christ, the Eternal Wisdom, as He is called by the Church in the Litany of the Holy Name. The house built by the Eternal Wisdom is commonly understood to be the Church, which is the spiritual house of the faithful. Many Saints and commentators, however, have also explained this text with reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amongst them is St. Athanasius, who says : ' Wisdom,

that is, the Word, or the Son of God, Who had no body, built Himself a house in the Blessed Virgin Mary, and became man for our salvation.' And St. Bernard: 'The great God has built Himself a house, namely, the Blessed Virgin Mary.' Raymund Jordanus, or Idiota, writes thus on the same text: 'Wisdom hath built a house, Mary, Virgin and Mother. The Blessed Virgin was not to be the habitation of the devil; the devil was not allowed to usurp the beginnings of this house to the prejudice of the Almighty Architect, of Whom it could then have been said that He built a house not for Himself, but for the devil. Far be it from us to speak in such a manner of our Blessed Lady, who was never anything else than the house of God, the house of the Lord strongly built, and well founded upon a firm rock.'

When a man wants to build a house, as Venerable Godfrey, Abbot of Admont, remarks, he first prepares the materials; and if he sees in the stone or the timber anything unfit for the purpose, he casts it aside. In this manner, Mary, the house of the Son of God, was prepared; she was preserved from all stain of both original and actual sin; and thus, being entirely pure and holy, she was a fit habitation for the King of Heaven.

The seven pillars which support the house of the Eternal Wisdom may be looked upon as representing the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. This is the opinion of many authors, among whom we may mention Paul, surnamed 'the Deacon,' who describes Mary as the Virginal house, supported by seven columns, because she was enriched with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, to wit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, godliness, and the fear of the Lord. St. Peter Damian speaks in the same sense.

Others, as Cornelius a Lapide remarks, see in the seven pillars symbols of the seven principal virtues with which the Blessed Virgin was adorned and endowed; namely, the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity; and the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These being the chief virtues, from which all the others spring, and upon which all the others rest, may properly be called the columns of our spiritual edifice, that is, of all our actions, and of our whole life.

St. Bernard speaks on the subject before us in the following terms:

Wisdom, which was of God, and was God, coming from the Bosom of the Father, built

a house, His own Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, in which He hewed seven pillars. How did He hew in her seven pillars, but by preparing her as a fit habitation, in faith and good works? For the number of three may be referred to faith, the object of which is the Blessed Trinity. And the number of four to a holy life, since there are four principal moral virtues.

The whole Trinity was in Mary, by the presence of the Divine Majesty; the Son only taking flesh from her. This is evidently declared by the heavenly messenger, who, revealing to her the mystery of the Incarnation, addressed her, saying: 'Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee!' And again: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.' Here we have the Lord, the Power of the Most High, and the Holy Ghost; or, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For the Father cannot be without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor the Holy Ghost without both, as He proceeds from both, according to the words of the Son: 'I am in the Father, and the Father in Me;' and 'the Father Who abideth in Me, He doth the works' (John xiv.). It is then clear

that Mary possessed the faith in the Blessed Trinity.

Let us now see whether she had also the four cardinal virtues, similar to four pillars. And, in the first place, how could fortitude be wanting in her, who, trampling upon the pomps of the world, and despising the pleasures of the flesh, chose to live for God alone in perpetual virginity? In the Blessed Virgin were verified the words of Solomon: 'Who shall find a valiant woman? Far, and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her' (Prov. xxxi.). She was so strong, that she crushed the head of the infernal serpent, to whom the Lord had said: 'I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head.'

From her colloquy with the Angel, it is also quite clear that Mary was temperate, prudent, and just. For, being reverently saluted: 'Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee,' she did not extol herself, as one blessed by a singular privilege of grace; but she remained silent, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And must we not herein admire her temperance? Afterwards, when the Angel instructed her in the heavenly mysteries, she diligently

inquired how she should conceive and bring forth, knowing not man. And in this, no doubt, she was prudent. Her justice also evidently appears, when she professes herself to be the handmaid of the Lord. For, what the just confess themselves to be before God, is declared by the Psalmist: 'But as for the just, they shall give glory to Thy Name' (Ps. cix.).

Thus we see that the Blessed Virgin Mary was strong in her purpose, temperate in her silence, prudent in her question, just in her confession. And with these four pillars of virtue, and the three columns of faith, the heavenly Wisdom, that is, the Son of God, made for Himself a house in her.

Whosoever wishes to become the house of God must also necessarily be supported by these seven pillars, or, in other words, must be pleasing to God by faith and good works.

'O Israel, how great is the house of God! It is high and immense' (Baruch iii.). The house of God, of which the Prophet here speaks, remarks Cornelius a Lapide, is the whole world. But if the universe is a great and admirable production of the Most High, how much greater and more sublime is Mary, who is the masterpiece of God, and the best

of His creatures. If Wisdom, as Baruch says, was not found in Chanaan, nor in Theman, countries which were reputed the most advanced in knowledge, where shall we look for it, where may we expect to find it, but in God's own house, which He constructed, and in which He dwelled? Mary is the great and admirable house of Wisdom; in Mary we shall find God.

If Mary is the house of the Lord, if in her we find God, she is then also a house and a home to us all; and we may apply to her the words of the 64th Psalm: 'We shall be filled with the good things of thy house.' And which of the good things that are contained in this house do we stand more in need of, than the boundless mercy of the Mother of God? The mercy found in this house is, like the house itself, immense, as St. Bernard beautifully explains in these words: 'O Blessed Lady, who shall compass the length, and the breadth, and the height, and the depth of thy mercy? Its length profits all those who shall invoke thee even to the last day. Its breadth fills the whole world, so that we may say of thee also, that the earth is full of thy mercy. Its height restores the heavenly Jerusalem. Its depth procures Redemption

to those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Through thee heaven is filled with new citizens, hell is robbed of its prey, the ruins of Jerusalem are built up, and poor sinners obtain a new life' (Sermo iv., in Assumptione).



XVIII.

THE SPOUSE OF THE CANTICLE.

'Sponsabo te mihi in fide, et sponsabo te mihi in sempiternum.'—OSEE ii.

'I will espouse thee to me in faith, and I will espouse thee to me for ever.'



HE following note is prefixed to Solomon's Canticle of Canticles, in the Catholic versions of the Bible :

'This book is called the Canticle of Canticles, that is to say, the most excellent of all canticles, because it is full of high mysteries, relating to the happy union of Christ and His spouse, which is here begun by love, and is to be eternal in heaven. The spouse of Christ is the Church, more especially as to the happiest part of it, viz., perfect souls, every one of which is His beloved, but, above all others, the immaculate and ever Blessed Virgin-Mother.'

These remarks are borne out by the Com-

mentators. Thus, Cornelius a Lapide says that the word 'Spouse' may be taken in four different senses: 1st, the humanity of Christ, 2nd, the Church, 3rd, the Blessed Virgin Mary, 4th, the just soul. As regards its application to our Blessed Lady, he gives the following explanation: 'This Canticle may be properly understood of Christ, and of the Blessed Virgin, who shines among the just, as the moon among the stars. The Incarnation of the Word, moreover, and consequently the Espousals of the Church, were performed in her, and through her. The Word being made flesh, and Jesus being born of the Virgin Mary, we may say that in a manner Christ, espousing our flesh, espoused the Blessed Virgin. Hence many writers, such as Rupertus, Honorius of Autun, etc., explain this whole Book with reference to our Blessed Lady.'

The sense in which the term Spouse is referred to the Church, the same author calls total and adequate; that in which it is referred to the just soul, partial; and that in which it is referred to Mary, the principal one, with respect namely to the partial sense, as William Smits, O.S.F., remarks.

Let us consider some of the characteristic traits of the Spouse, as found in passages

applied to our Blessed Lady by the Church in her Offices.

‘Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.’ Mary is all fair, yea, the fairest, not only of all human creatures, but even if compared to the Angels. And there is in her no spot of either guilt or pain of sin, whether original, mortal, or venial. This is the sentiment of the whole Church, expressed by the Council of Trent. Long before that time, St. Augustine, having said that all mankind, even the just, are subject to venial sin, adds: ‘Except the Blessed Virgin Mary, of whom there can be no question when we speak of sin, for the sake of the honour due to the Lord.’ Hence the words: ‘Thou art all fair, and there is not a spot in thee,’ are applied to Mary alone, by Rupertus, St. Ildefonse, and many others.

‘I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.’

Our Blessed Lady is a daughter of Adam, who sinned, and by his sin contaminated his whole posterity. Mary did not contract this general infection; but, being a child of our common father, she appeared exteriorly black, as the daughter of a sinner. In herself, however, she was beautiful by the fulness of grace.

The Blessed Virgin was black through her humility, which made her wish to appear like other women. She came to the Temple to be purified like other mothers. But interiorly she was most pure and clean, and her humility made her the more acceptable and beautiful in the eyes of God.

This text may also be very aptly applied to our Blessed Lady, at the time of the Passion of her Divine Son. She was then the Mother of Sorrows; and the Sun of Justice being darkened, Mary, the heavenly moon, also grew dim, by the martyrdom of her soul. In these words: 'I am black,' we may thus see the Blessed Virgin depicted attired in mourning, contemplating the sufferings of Jesus Christ. When our dear Saviour suffered and died, Mary suffered, and, in a certain manner, died with Him, through the greatness of her love. She could then truly say, 'I am black, I am darkened; my beloved Son suffers and is despised: I must suffer and be despised with Him.'

'How beautiful art thou, and how comely, my dearest, in delights!'

There is in the whole creation nothing so beautiful, so comely, so delightful as the Blessed Virgin Mary. Hence the Church

sings in our Lady's Office the following antiphon taken from this text : ' Thou art made beautiful and sweet in thy delights, O holy Mother of God !' At the consideration of these words, Hailgrinus exclaims : ' How beautiful art thou in thy Maternity, how comely in thy Virginitv, how admirable in both united !' How great must have been the delights of the Blessed Virgin, when she embraced Jesus the Son of God ; when she fed Him Who feeds the angels ! For she was conscious of the Divine mysteries, and of her privileges. She knew that she was the Mother of God, our Saviour ; and this knowledge filled her soul with ineffable delights.

' When the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof.'

When the Son of God was yet in the bosom of His eternal Father, He smelt the sweet odour of the spikenard, or balsam of the nardus-plant, that is, of the humility of the Blessed Virgin ; and attracted thereby, He descended from heaven. ' Humility,' says Rupertus, ' is the repose of the mind, and whosoever finds this virtue, finds rest of the soul. I (the Mother of God) sought this rest in all things ; and the King, smelling the aromatic odour of this my spikenard, looked, and saw

that He could rest in the stillness, that is, in the humility, of my heart. Then He descended from the eternal throne of His repose, and rested in my tabernacle; and, being the Lord of all things, He became the Son of His hand-maid.'

The King of Glory took His repose in Mary in the Incarnation. And how often did He rest in her arms when a Child!

'Sleep, Holy Babe, upon Thy Mother's breast!
Great Lord of earth, and sea, and sky,
How sweet it is to see Thee lie
In such a place of rest!'^o

Oh! how pleasing must then have been the odour of her purity, her humility, and all her other virtues, to the King of humility, the God of the humble!

'I sought Him, whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, and found Him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.' Rupertus and others apply these words to our Blessed Lady, when she had lost Jesus in Jerusalem. Great, indeed, as St. Alphonsus remarks, must have been the grief of this afflicted Mother, who went about in every direction, asking with the Spouse in

^o Fr. Edward Caswall, of the Oratory.

the Canticle: 'Have you seen Him, whom my soul loveth?' But she could hear no tidings of Him. Oh! with how much more tenderness must Mary, oppressed with fatigue and grief in looking for her Son, and unable to find Him, have repeated what Ruben said of his brother Joseph: 'The boy doth not appear, and whither shall I go?' My Jesus doth not appear, and I know not what to do in order to find Him; but where shall I go without my treasure?

What, asks St. Bonaventure, could avail the comfort which her friends and relations endeavoured to give her? Can aught compensate for the loss of Jesus? The Blessed Virgin, finding her search fruitless, addressed herself to God, her constant refuge, and sole consolation, saying, 'O God, my Father, my eternal Lord, Thou didst grant me Thine own beloved Son; I, alas! have lost Him, and do not know where to find Him! Oh! restore Him to me again! Look on the greatness of my affliction! Return, O Jesus, to Thy Mother; or let me know where Thou art! My dearest Son, do not delay to come back to me, for Thou art my joy and all my hope, and without Thee I cannot live.'

Such must have been Mary's sentiments

when she had lost Jesus, and sought Him sorrowing, until at length she found the object of her desires, the Beloved of her soul.

‘Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it.’

By these many waters we may understand the sorrows, tribulations, privations, and all the trials of this life. The Blessed Virgin has suffered more than the martyrs, of whom she is therefore the Queen. She suffered with her Divine Son, and on His account. She died, as it were, with Him on the Cross; and the memory of His torments caused her during the remainder of her life the most intense grief. She also felt in her heart the sufferings of the disciples and faithful, of whom she was the most affectionate Mother. But all these afflictions, far from quenching her charity, rather fed and augmented it, to the end of her mortal career.

We also have to suffer, we also must be tried. Let our sufferings never extinguish our charity. Let us rather say with St. Paul: ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? But in all these things we overcome because of Him that hath loved us’ (Rom. viii.).

If these are our sentiments, our souls shall, in imitation of our Blessed Lady, also be the spouses of our Lord. And if we are faithful to our heavenly Bridegroom now, we shall celebrate with Him an eternal marriage-feast in a better life.



XIX.

THE LILY.

'Sicut lilium inter spinas.'—CANT. ii. 2.

'As the lily among thorns.'

THE lily is a beautiful plant, and one of the greatest ornaments of our gardens. It claims one of the first, if not the first place among the flowers. At its sight our mind is filled with pleasing admiration; sweet and agreeable is its odour; and its brilliant whiteness is unequalled by any other flower. It rests nobly on the top of the stem, which keeps it elevated from the ground, as if wishing to preserve its purity unstained. This beautiful flower is composed of six leaves, which are united in the form of a chalice; and in this unspotted white chalice are contained six golden grains.

By common consent the lily is considered

the symbol of purity and virginity, and the saints who have excelled in these virtues are usually represented with a lily in their hand. But Mary is the purest of creatures ; her heart was entirely holy and immaculate, and free from all stain of sin. No wonder, then, that we apply to her the words of the Canticle, saying : ' As the lily among thorns, so is Mary among the daughters of Adam.' And St. John Damascene very properly calls her ' A lily in the midst of thorns, conspicuous by the whiteness of chastity, and the brightness of virginity.'

The beauty and spotless whiteness of the lily are admirable in themselves. We must say the same of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But we get to know things better by means of comparisons. In the Canticle the lily is described as growing among thorns. Compare, then, the lily to the thorns which surround it, in beauty, in brightness, in perfume ; and you will perceive how much the lily is preferable. The dark colour of the thorns contrasts with the unspotted white of the flower ; the stiff and awkward prickles appear uglier near so graceful a form ; and the whole plant seems if possible more odourless and sterile, when our sense of smell is agree-

ably affected by the sweet perfume of the lily.

In a similar manner, if the consideration of Mary's prerogatives and excellent qualities makes us admire her, and invoke her as truly holy, Mother of God, Immaculate Virgin; then if to this consideration we add a comparison, we will see that she is a Virgin most singular, and the Virgin of virgins.

Mary is like a lily among thorns, if compared with all the children of Adam. 'Cursed be the earth,' said God to our common father after his fall; 'thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.' Not only does the earth bring forth thorns and thistles materially speaking, but also in a spiritual sense: for the thorns and thistles are the sins with which the whole surface of the earth is covered. And as sin would not exist but for those who commit it, and who are slaves to it, we may say that, as guilty children of a guilty father, we are all represented by these thistles and thorns. But in the midst of this sinful world, there is one immaculate and without stain; in the midst of these thorns and thistles there is one spotless lily. In the midst of the guilty children of Adam, Mary stands pure and undefiled.

It is, however, not only when we compare our Blessed Lady to the rest of mankind, who all came into this world stained by sin, that she stands singled out by her immaculate purity; but even when she is surrounded by choirs of virgins, the spotless beauty and splendour of her admirable Virginité surpasses in an unspeakable manner that of all the others. For, 'What purity,' asks St. Bernard, 'even of the angelic spirits, dares compare with that Virginité, which was found worthy to become the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, and the habitation of the Son of God?' And if the Angels cannot be compared to her in purity, how much less weak, frail, sinful mortals? How much less those who, however great may be their desire of perfection, must nevertheless say with St. Paul: 'I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind' (Rom. vii.). And: 'There was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me' (2 Cor. xii.). Mary therefore stands, even in the midst of pure and chaste souls, as an immaculate lily among thorns.

The thorns may also be taken as symbols of concupiscence, passions, evil inclinations, and the allurements of the world. We are

frequently pricked by the sharp points of these thorns, when we feel their dangerous influences, and they become to us causes of temptation and sin. But Mary was never wounded by them: she lived in the body as having no body; she lived on earth like the Angels live in heaven. As the lily blooms on the top of the stem, so Mary was elevated above the frailties of the human heart, and the affections of earth; and she aspired only to the pure and noble delights which are found in communicating with God.

The lily contains in its white chalice six beautiful golden grains. Philip Picinelli, considering this subject, exclaims: 'O how lovely is the flower which is enriched, and as it were crowned with a diadem of six golden grains! O Mary, most noble lily, in thee were found the golden grains of the inestimable treasures of grace, and thou canst say with Ecclesiasticus: "In me is all grace of the way and of the truth."'

St. Bonaventure* gives the following beautiful description of the lily, which we may apply both to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to ourselves.

Chastity blooms like a lily, as we read in

* *Diætæ Salutis*, Titul. iv. cap. 4.

the Canticle : 'As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.' And let us take notice, that the lily has six snow-white leaves, and six golden grains. The white leaves represent chastity of the body, and the golden grains purity of the mind.

The six leaves of the lily symbolize the six things necessary for the acquisition and preservation of corporal chastity. The first leaf is sobriety ; whence St Jerome says : 'Let a virgin abstain from wine as from poison ; for wine and youth are a twofold fire of lust.' The second leaf is asperity of dress, as St. Bernard declares, saying : 'Remember that the coarser the plant, the softer the texture which is made of it. So also a coarse dress is the covering of a chaste body.' The third leaf is indefatigable labour ; as, on the contrary, sloth and idleness are conducive to impurity. This is illustrated in David, who, being idle at home, fell into adultery. The fourth leaf is the guard of the senses, especially the eyes and the ears ; for curiosity in seeing and hearing leads to sin and destruction. Thus we read in Genesis that when Dina, the daughter of Jacob, had gone out to see the women of the Sichimites, Hemor took her away, and ravished her. The fifth leaf is the bridling of

the tongue, especially as regards all scurrilous and immodest words. For unbecoming language excites lust. 'Be not seduced,' says St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians; 'evil communications corrupt good manners' (1 Cor. xv. 33). And St. Jerome: 'Let a virgin's words be pure, modest, and few.' The sixth leaf is the avoidance of dangerous occasions, especially of persons of the other sex. Wild beasts have a finer skin than domestic animals. In the Second Book of Kings it is also related that Tamar was corrupted by Amnon, because they were alone. Hence St. Bernard very well says: 'Virgins who wish to remain pure, must always be watchful, and never think themselves secure; they must be on their guard, even when they think they have no reason to fear.'

In the lily there are six golden grains, which may be looked upon as representing charity. For the love of God in a chaste mind must have three qualities: it must be prudent, lest, being deceived, we fall away from God; it must be sweet, lest, being puffed up, we be cut off from God; it must be strong, lest, being overcome, we be dragged away from God.

Charity has also three principal motives: we

must love God with our whole heart, because He is our Creator ; with our whole soul, because He is our Redeemer ; and with our whole mind, because He is our Reward.

The lily appears as a symbol of Mary's virginity in the following wonderful occurrence, recorded in the Chronicles of the Friars Minor.

In the lifetime of Brother Giles, there was a certain learned master of the Order of Friars Preachers, who was for many years tempted with a great doubt concerning the virginity of the mother of God ; for he could not understand how it was possible that Mary could be Mother, and remain a virgin. However, as a true child of the Church, he fought against this temptation ; he was sorry on account of it, and desired to be freed from it by some enlightened man. Hearing of the fame of Brother Giles's sanctity, he resolved to go to see him. Brother Giles, knowing in spirit the approach of the Friar Preacher, and the cause of his visit, went to meet him ; and, before he had time to speak, the holy brother struck the ground with the stick he had in his hand, and exclaimed : 'O Friar Preacher, a Virgin before childbirth !' And no sooner had he uttered these words, than

a beautiful white lily sprang up from the earth. He then struck the ground a second time, exclaiming : ' O Friar Preacher, a Virgin in childbirth ! ' And instantly there came forth another lily. For the third time he struck the ground, saying : ' O Friar Preacher, a Virgin after childbirth ! ' And immediately a third lily appeared.

As soon as this was done, the holy and humble Brother Giles, without adding another word, hastily left the place. And at the same moment the Friar Preacher found himself delivered from his temptation.



XX.

THE ROSE.

'Quasi plantatio rosæ in Jericho.'—ECCL. xxiv. 18.

'As a rose-plant in Jericho.'

MARY is very appropriately represented under the symbol of a rose. For as the rose is the queen of flowers, so the Blessed Virgin is the Queen of the Angels and Saints, who may be called the flowers of God's creation. Oh, how gracefully buds the rose on the thorny stem, conspicuous by its bright colour, and spreading its sweet and pleasing odour!

It is not improbably thought that in the neighbourhood of Jericho the rose reaches its greatest beauty and perfection.

As the rose springs from a thorny stem, and yet has in itself no prickles, but is all smooth and fair, and pleasing to the eye, so

our Blessed Lady, although sprung from a race infected by original sin, was smooth and fair by grace, and free from the thorns of guilt. St. John Damascene sees in the thorns with which the stem of the rose is covered, a figure of the Jewish people. 'O Rose,' he exclaims, 'sprung from the thorns, that is, from the Jews, thou hast spread abroad thy heavenly odour!'

Of this heavenly Rose, Sedulius elegantly writes :

*'Et velut in spinis mollis rosa surgit acutis,
Nil quod lædat habens, matremque obscurat
honore ;
Sic Evæ de stirpe, sacra veniente Maria,
Virginis antiquæ facinus nova virgo piavit :
Sicut spina rosam, genuit Judæa Mariam.'*

Which means :

'As on a thorny stem the rose buds sweet and fair,
Not knowing how to wound, its origin ignores :
So from Eve's sinful race comes Mary, Virgin rare,
Who, pure and innocent, man's former lot re-
stores.
Thus, as a thorn the rose, does Juda Mary bear.'

St. Bernard, in the same sense, making a comparison between Mary and Eve, says :
'Eve was a thorn, Mary a rose. Eve proved herself a thorn by the wounds she inflicted, Mary a rose by assuaging our evils. Eve was

a thorn, attaching death to all ; Mary a rose, restoring to us our happy lot.'

The pleasing colour and sweet smell of the rose represent the virtues of the Mother of God. It is true that the beauty of the king's daughter is within. This beauty consists in the innocence of the mind and the devotion of the heart ; and without these qualities there is no true beauty. But although her beauty is within, she is also, as the Psalmist says, adorned exteriorly with a variety of ornaments. The veil of her modesty and humility cannot entirely hide her virtues, for they shine with so bright a lustre that they cannot remain unnoticed or unseen. Now, if all her virtues were truly admirable and sublime, first and foremost among them is her burning love, represented by the red hue of the rose. Whether we consider her charity with regard to God, or to her neighbour, we shall immediately be convinced of the truth of the words of St. Bernard, that after the charity of Jesus Christ, there is none greater than that of Mary ; there is no created love which can ever equal hers. The love which she bore Jesus caused her to become the Queen of Martyrs, symbolized by the red colour of the queen of flowers ; her love to-

wards us prompted her to make the sacrifice of her own most dear Son in our behalf. At this consideration, some pious authors were so forcibly struck with the greatness of Mary's charity, that they applied to her the words of the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, saying: 'For Mary so loved the world, as to give her only begotten Son.'

Who does not find in the sweet odour of the rose, which gives it a claim to the title of queen of our gardens, a figure of the heavenly perfume of virtue, which is the delight of innocent hearts? And who has not perceived the fragrant odour of Mary, the Mystical Rose? Who has not been drawn to her, attracted by its sweetness? Through her, indeed, the good odour of Christ is, as St. Paul expresses it, made manifest in them that are saved (2 Cor. ii. 15). Hence St. Cyril of Alexandria, speaking against Nestorius, says: 'This is the Virgin through whom the Holy Trinity is glorified and adored in the whole world; through whom heaven exults, the Angels and Archangels rejoice; through whom the devil is put to flight, and our fallen race returns to heaven; through whom the blind idolaters were brought to the knowledge of the truth; through whom churches have been founded all over the

earth ; through whom the nations are led to penance ; through whom, to speak briefly, the Son of God, Who is the true light, shone on them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death ; through whom the Prophets have prophesied, the Apostles have preached salvation to the Gentiles ; through whom the dead are brought back to life, and the kings reign in the name of the Holy Trinity.'

Mary, indeed, draws us to her by the odour of her virtues and admirable qualities, and attaches us to her by inexhaustible mercy and kindness. By the special power which is found in true devotion to her, she spreads a sweet perfume over the precepts and counsels of the Gospel, and makes the rugged path of virtue and duty appear to us less difficult, yea even agreeable.

We have compared the thorns with which the rose is surrounded to sin, and to the Jewish people ; but we may also look upon them as representing the trials and sufferings of this life. The thorns do not cause to the rose any loss of its freshness or perfume ; neither did the sorrows of Mary, the Mystical Rose, lessen the splendour of her virtues, or the transcendent beauty of her soul. The thorns grow up with the rose, and along with it they become bigger.

Mary's sorrows also increased with the years, until at length they made of the Mystical Rose of charity, the Queen of Martyrs at the foot of the Cross. And thus the thorns of suffering, far from lessening the beauty of the virtues of the Mother of God, enhanced it, according to the words of the Apostle: 'Power is made perfect in infirmity.'

As the Blessed Virgin is compared to the rose, and is invoked by the faithful as the Mystical Rose, it seems very appropriate that the beautiful prayer, in which the Angelic salutation is so often repeated, should have obtained the title of 'the Rosary.' This spiritual crown of roses, offered to the Mystical Rose, is commendable, not only on account of the many indulgences with which it is enriched, but also because our Blessed Lady has frequently shown that this form of prayer is singularly pleasing to her. Among many examples, we select the following, found in the 'Book of the Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.'*

A certain young student who was very devout to the Mother of God, was in the habit of making every day a crown of fresh flowers, which he then, in the simplicity of his

* Cf. *Magnum Spec. Exempl. Dist.*, ix., Ex. cxv.

heart, placed on the head of our Lady's statue in the church. His parents, considering his good conduct and his devotion, placed him in a monastery, that he might become a monk there. The young man, being now shut up, and unable to perform his pious task as usual in Mary's honour, began to weep bitterly. On the prior asking him what was the cause of his tears, 'Father,' he said, 'I am accustomed to place every day a fresh crown on the head of our Lady's image, and I am now prevented from going out, by the rules of the monastery.' 'My dear son,' replied the prior, 'be not afflicted for this cause; but say every day fifty Hail Marys, with the Our Father after every ten, in honour of thy beloved Mother; and thus thou shalt offer her a crown far more pleasing to her than the former.' The holy youth was faithful to this pious practice; and growing in virtue and grace along with the years, he at length became prior of the monastery.

One day he had to go out on some business, and took one of the brethren with him, to accompany him, according to religious custom. Some robbers had heard of the errand of the servants of God, and followed them with evil intent. On the way the prior bethought

himself that he had that day not yet recited our Lady's crown, and said to his companion: 'Let us stop here a little while, my brother; rest thyself, whilst I say a few prayers.' He then knelt down, and devoutly recited the Rosary. The robbers, who were looking on at no great distance, saw a lady of admirable grace and beauty standing before him. At every salutation she took a beautiful rose from his mouth; and with these flowers she wove a crown, which, at the completion of the prayers, she placed on her own head; and thereupon she suddenly disappeared.

The thieves now rushed from their hiding-place to the prior, saying: 'Unless thou tell us immediately who was the lady that stood by thee, thou shalt not escape death.' 'My children,' replied the monk, 'I was not aware of the presence of any lady.' 'It is not so,' said the robbers, 'for we have seen her; and we want to know not only who she was, but also what thou didst say to her.' The prior now perceiving what they meant, and seeing that God had opened their eyes to behold the Blessed Virgin, related to them the whole history of his life, and how he daily wove a spiritual crown of roses in Mary's honour. The robbers were so moved at the words of

the prior, that they fell on their knees before him, and made the confession of their crimes. They mended their ways, began to lead a good life, and died a happy death. And the saintly prior, grateful towards his heavenly Mother, remained faithful in the performance of his pious task, and increased day by day in devotion to the Mother of God.



XXI.

THE DOVE.

'Columba mea in foraminibus petrae, in caverna macerata.'—CANT. ii. 14.

'My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall.'



GREAT many saints and pious writers have given to Mary the title of 'Dove'; and the Church also in her Offices applies to her the various texts of Holy Scripture in which the dove is mentioned.

The dove is, then, generally considered as a symbol of the Blessed Virgin; and the different qualities and attributes of the dove, as described in the sacred pages, may with great truth and propriety be used to illustrate Mary's virtues and perfections. As the Mother of God stands singled out from among all creatures, and surpasses them all, the Be-

loved in the Canticle speaks of her in a mystical sense, saying: 'One is my dove, my perfect one.' Extolling the comeliness of his spouse, he remarks that her eyes are 'as those of the dove,' and her cheeks 'as the turtle-dove's.' Inviting her into his garden, he says: 'Arise, make haste, my love, my dove!' Coming to visit her, he addresses her with these words: 'Open to me, my dove, my undefiled!'

These praises of the spouse, taken from her similitude with the dove, are eminently applicable to Mary, who is the spouse as well as the Mother of God. What more can we say of her, but that she is a dove, a perfect one, the only one, the chosen one (Cant. vi. 8)? What can we add to these glorious titles? Among so many Angels and Saints, who have excelled in purity, humility, and all other virtues, Mary stands alone; and compared with them she is called the perfect one, the only one, the chosen one, the one who is all fair, and immaculate. Truly 'the only one,' for there never has been one like her, nor will there be another. 'The only one,' for she alone is Virgin and Mother.

Let us consider in detail the various qualities of this heavenly Dove, the Blessed Virgin

Mary. Doves delight in retirement and solitude, whence they choose for their habitations lofty places, such as towers, or the highest parts of buildings, and also sequestered spots, according to the words of the Canticle: 'My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall.' At the age of three years Mary entered into the solitude of the Temple; afterwards she lived retired at Nazareth. Hence Reismyller says that, in a mystical sense, the dove in solitude is our Blessed Lady, who, after the Incarnation of the Son of God, was wholly absorbed in the contemplation of divine things: she lived for God alone, and remained retired in her house, as in the clefts of the rock, or the hidden places of the wall.

The holy Fathers have also very generally considered the clefts of the rock and the hollow of the wall as symbols of the five wounds of our Blessed Redeemer. Thus St. Gregory says: 'By the clefts of the rock, I understand the wounds in Christ's hands and feet; and by the hollow of the wall, the opening which the lance made in His side. The dove is rightly described as dwelling in the clefts of the rock and the hollow of the wall; for when the soul, by the consideration of the

Cross, imitates Christ's patience, and when for her instruction she meditates on the sacred wounds, she is like a dove in the clefts of the rock.' The Abbot Rupertus also, speaking on the words of the Prophet Zacharias, 'And they shall look upon Me, Whom they have pierced,' says: 'The nails and the lance made openings for my soul; in these openings I dwell, and I sigh, as the dove in the clefts of the rock—that is, in the wounds made by the nails; and in the hollow of the wall, which means the wound inflicted by the lance.'

St. Bernard writes on the same subject in the following terms: 'The clefts of the rock represent the wounds of Christ, and properly so, for the rock is Christ. Blessed clefts which confirm our faith in the Resurrection, and in the Divinity of Christ, for at their sight Thomas exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!" In these clefts the turtle-dove finds a nest for herself (Ps. lxxxiii.); here the dove finds shelter, and is safe from the bird of prey. Truly there is no better place of repose than the wounds of our Blessed Saviour. There I fear not, there I fall not, for I am founded upon a firm rock. There I find the fulness of sweetness, the plenitude of grace, the perfection of virtues.'

In these clefts Mary dwelt most constantly and most faithfully; in this rock she made her nest; in this solitude she passed her days, and found rest, until her solitary exile on earth was exchanged for the lasting dwelling of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Oh! who shall give us wings like a dove, that we may fly and be at rest (Ps. liv.), and hide ourselves in this holy solitude with the Mother of God!

The dove is a type of chastity, according to the words of the Canticle: 'My dove, my undefiled.' Doves are fond of cleanliness, and dislike dirt, which represents sin. It is a universal custom to whitewash their cots, as they have a great liking for the white colour. The dove is also said to be chaste, and faithful in its affections, and withal of great fecundity, for it has young ones frequently in the year. These two qualities, namely, chastity and fecundity, are united in an admirable and ineffable manner in the Blessed Virgin Mary, who alone is Virgin and Mother together.

The dove is also a symbol of simplicity, for our dear Saviour says to His Apostles: 'Be simple as doves.' If, as St. Bernard declares, 'simplicity is a constant and un-

changed will with regard to the same thing,' it follows that the virtue of simplicity consists in directing our will and our intention purely towards God, asking of Him one thing, seeking one thing, and not desiring many things in this world.

Simplicity is free from deceit, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. Simplicity, as Cornelius a Lapide remarks, is opposed to duplicity, hypocrisy, deceit, and fraud. What is done in a deceitful manner lacks the merit of simplicity; and as we read in the Book of Wisdom: 'The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful' (ch. i. 5). 'Wo,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'to them that are of a double heart.' The merit and reward of simplicity are very great; for St. Dorothy remarks that if anyone seek God and His holy will in simplicity of heart, God will, if circumstances require it, teach him through the mouth of a child, so that he may not go astray. But to one who seeks Him in a feigned manner, God will give a deceitful doctor, who will lead him into error, and into a snare.

St. Gregory, commenting on the words, 'Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in simplicity of heart,' says: 'Simplicity of heart is as the daylight, not clouded by

fraud, not obscured by deceit.' The light of truth illumines it, the presence of the divine brightness enlightens it, for it is written: 'His communication is with the simple' (Prov. iii. 32). God communicates with us, when He teaches us His holy will. God is said to communicate with the simple, because by the light of His inspiration He instructs their mind in heavenly things. And, on the contrary, 'The deceitful man the Lord will abhor' (Ps. v. 7).

At the consideration of the words of our Saviour, 'Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God,' St. Augustine says: 'A clean heart means a simple heart. And as the light of this world cannot be seen but by clean eyes, so God cannot be seen but by a pure heart.' Mary truly sought God in the simplicity and sincerity of her heart; for she sought nothing but Him. He was her only good, her only treasure.

As the Blessed Virgin sought God with a clean and simple heart, she also merited to behold Him; for 'Blessed are the clean of heart.' Mary not only saw God in spirit, but she had the singular privilege of living in the company and enjoying the constant familiarity of Jesus. Her eyes were pure and bright,

simple and sincere, full of modesty, and also full of kindness. Oh ! how admirable are the eyes of the Mother of God ! ‘Thy eyes are as dove’s eyes,’ clean and perfect towards God, modest with regard to herself, kind and compassionate with regard to us. Her eyes are so full of tenderness, her looks so sweet, that she seems to invite us, and encourage us to approach her with confidence. Whence St. Bernard says : ‘Turn over the pages of Scripture, and if you find in Mary anything harsh, mistrust her then, and fear to go near her. But if on the contrary all that relates to her breathes nothing but affection and kindness, peace and mercy, return thanks to Him, Who has provided so excellent a Mother to intercede for you.’ Let us therefore from our heart exclaim with the Church : ‘Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us !’

Mary, being so kind and compassionate, brings tidings of peace and reconciliation to the world. She is represented by the dove which Noe sent forth out of the ark ; and, as Holy Scripture tells us, ‘she came to him in the evening carrying a bough of an olive tree, with green leaves.’ St. Germanus, addressing Mary, says : ‘Hail, O Dove, who bringest us the fruit of the olive tree, and the Deliverer

from the spiritual deluge! She brought tidings of peace to the whole world, for she is the Mother of Jesus, Who came to save all mankind, and Who reconciled us to the Father by His death.

Mary is still a Mystical Dove to us. She still brings to the poor sinner the olive-branch of peace, and the sign of the cessation of God's anger, which we have so often deserved.

O pure, O kind, O heavenly Dove, reconcile us with thy Son, recommend us to thy Son, present us to thy Son! (St. Bernard).



XXII.

THE CLOUD.

*'Ecce nubecula parva quasi vestigium hominis
ascendebat de mari.'*—3 REG. xviii.

'Behold a little cloud arose out of the sea like a
man's foot.'

KING Achab set up an altar for Baal in the temple which he built for this idol in Samaria, and he did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings his predecessors. At that time there lived a famous prophet, Elias, who zealously exercised the power which God had given him for the good of the people. By his prayers Elias shut up the heavens from giving rain for more than three years, which occasioned a dreadful famine all over the land. Whilst others felt the severe punishment due to their sins, the prophet was fed in a miraculous manner.

After many days, Elias went at God's command to Achab. This wicked king, seeing him, said : ' Art thou he that troublest Israel ? ' The prophet replied : ' I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, who have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and have followed Baalim. Nevertheless, send now, and gather unto me all Israel, unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, who eat at Jezabel's table.'

Achab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered together the prophets unto Mount Carmel. And Elias, coming to all the people, said : ' If the Lord be God, follow Him : but if Baal, then follow him.'

He then made the proposal, that the prophets of Baal should prepare a sacrifice, and he would do in the like manner. The false prophets should call upon Baal, and he would invoke the God of Israel. And the God that would answer by fire, him they would serve. This proposal was accepted by the people.

Baal, being invoked, gave no reply ; but at Elias's prayer the fire of the Lord fell from heaven, and consumed the holocaust as well as the altar itself. At this sight the people

fell on their faces, and confessed that the Lord was the only God. The false prophets of Baal were thereupon put to death.

Then Elias went up to the top of Mount Carmel, and began to pray for rain. And he said to his servant : ' Go up and look towards the sea.' And he went up, and looked, and said, ' There is nothing.' And again he said to him, ' Return seven times.' And at the seventh time, behold a little cloud arose out of the sea, like a man's foot. And he said, ' Go up and say to Achab, " Prepare thy chariot and go down, lest the rain prevent thee." ' The heavens immediately grew dark with clouds ; and scarcely had the people time to reach the town of Jezrahel, before there came a copious and welcome fall of rain.

How often do we shut up heaven by our sins ! How frequently do whole nations forget the Lord, and offend Him as Israel did ! God is, no doubt, infinitely good ; goodness is one of His attributes, and to His goodness we owe all the blessings which we enjoy, or can receive. But He is also infinitely just ; and in His justice He must render to everyone according to his works, and to the sinner according to the wickedness of his ways. However, in the very effects of His justice in this

world, His goodness again appears, for it is not His will that the sinner should die, but rather that he should be converted from his ways, and live. By His chastisement God wants us to enter into ourselves, and return to Him.

We must, therefore, in all our trials and afflictions, turn ourselves to the Lord; and God on His part will soon show us signs of His mercy. In such circumstances we must betake ourselves to prayer. St. James illustrates the power of a fervent prayer by the very event which we have just recorded. 'Elias,' he says, 'prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months. And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.'

But to whom shall we address ourselves in our affliction? Shall we go to the very God whom we have offended? Are we not abominable in His sight? Certainly God hears the prayer of the repentant sinner. A kind word, however, spoken in our favour, a word said by way of introduction, will do us no harm. And who is better able to speak in our behalf, who is dearer to God and nearer to His throne, than the Blessed Virgin Mary?

In the little cloud which the servant of Elias saw coming up from the sea, we have a figure of the Mother of God. As the cloud rose out of the bitter waters without having in itself any bitterness, so Mary came forth from the sinful ocean of this world without any sin.

Arnold Bostius, in his 'History of our Lady of Mount Carmel,' says, that it is believed that, in this vision of the little cloud rising out of the sea, God revealed to Elias four great mysteries: first, that there was to come a virgin, who would enter into this world free from sin; second, the time when this would happen; third, that this virgin would, like Elias himself, always remain a virgin; fourth, that God, uniting His nature to the human nature, would be born of this virgin.

Bernardine de Busto also remarks, with many others, that the Blessed Virgin is represented by this little cloud on account of her humility. An admirable humility, indeed, which attracted the looks of the Almighty, and caused Him to work great wonders in her. The little cloud, rising up from the sea, increased in size, until it made torrents of welcome rain descend upon the earth. Mary also, being little by her profound humility, in-

creased in grace and in merits, and brought streams of blessings down upon the world.

Let us, therefore, place all our hope in Mary, the little cloud, which announces to us the abundance of God's grace. The Church encourages us to hope in the Mother of God, for she calls her 'Our Hope,' saying in the *Salve Regina*: 'Hail, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope!' And she applies to her the words of Ecclesiasticus: 'I am the Mother of Holy Hope.' St. Bernard, speaking in the same sense, addresses Mary thus: 'Let them hope in thee that know thy name: for thou hast not forsaken them that seek thee, O Lady! (Ps. ix.). They that hope in thee, O Mary, shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint (Isa. xl.). Who, then, would not hope in thee, since thou helpest even those who are in despair? Let therefore those who despair hope in thee!'

The Mother of God is also in mystical terms called 'a cloud' by Isaias the Prophet. 'Behold,' he says, 'the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt' (xix. 1). St. Ambrose teaches that this swift cloud

° Super *Salve Regina*.

represents the Blessed Virgin: upon this cloud the Lord ascended; on the occasion of the Flight, Mary carried Jesus in her arms into Egypt, to save Him from the fury and persecution of Herod.

We shall find additional reasons for placing all our hope and trust in the Mother of God, if we compare her to the cloud of the Israelites. Albertus Magnus calls her 'An overshadowing and guiding cloud.' When the Israelites were on their way to the land of promise, this cloud sheltered them during the day from the fiery rays of the sun; and at night it became brilliant, and gave them light, and guided them on the way.

Of this cloud we read in the Book of Exodus: 'And the Lord went before them to show the way by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire: that He might be the guide of their journey at both times' (Exod. xiii. 21). And in the Psalms: 'He conducted them in a cloud by day: and all the night with a light of fire' (lxxvii.). And again: 'He spread a cloud for their protection, and fire to give them light in the night' (cxiv.).

Mary is to us a pillar of a cloud; and a pillar of fire. As the cloud sheltered the

Israelites by day from the scorching rays of the sun, and was a defence against their enemies: so the Blessed Virgin protects us against the ardour of our passions, and defends us against our spiritual enemies. Mary is also a pillar of a cloud to us by day, because she shelters us from the effects of God's just anger, which we so often provoke by our sins.

The Blessed Virgin is a pillar of fire to us at night; that is, during our mortal life here on earth, which is properly compared to the night, since the bright day of eternity has not yet dawned upon us. During this night the Mother of God enlightens us, and guides us by her holy example and by her maternal affection and care. She is also a bright cloud to us in the dark night of tribulation, and in the gloom of the many sufferings both of body and soul which we have to endure.

Idiota, writing on this subject, addresses Mary in these terms: 'Thou, O Virgin most benign, art a cloud formed by the Almighty for the protection and defence of poor sinners. Thou hast received a twofold office from the Lord: for as the cloud protects us from the burning heat of the sun, so thou, O Virgin most pious, protectest us from the wrath of

the Sun of Justice. And as a bright cloud suspended between heaven and earth, so thou givest us light by thy holy prayers and examples; for thou truly art a light, showing the brightness of virtue. Like a cloud and a wall of fire also thou defendest us against the devil, and against sin and vice.'

Thou, O Mary, art a dense cloud, by the abundance of thy graces and prerogatives. Thou art a cloud moved by the wind; that is, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, who attracted, carried, guided, and guarded thee. Thou, O Blessed Virgin, art a cloud sending the refreshing and fertile rain upon the earth, which cools the heat of our passions and fertilizes man's heart so as to cause it to yield the fruits of good works. Thou also coolest the ardour of the Sun of Justice; that is, the anger and indignation of God, by thy assiduous prayers, in consequence of which He forbears striking wicked sinners.

O most holy Virgin, obtain for me by thy powerful prayers that I may spend my days here under thy shadow, and hereafter eternally dwell with thee in the land of the living!



XXIII.

JUDITH.

'Tu gloria Jerusalem, tu lætitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri.'—JUDITH XV.

'Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people.'



ABUCHODONOSOR, not the famous king of Babylon, but another of that name, who reigned in Ninive, had formed the project of reducing the surrounding nations to his obedience, and making himself a universal monarch. For that purpose, during the reign of Manasses, about 656 years before Christ, he invaded the kingdom of Juda with an immense army of Assyrians, under the command of Holofernes, whom he ordered to conquer every kingdom in the West; for he fancied that no power would be able to stand against him. Holofernes advanced towards Bethulia, which was situ-

ated amongst the mountains of Galilee, with an army consisting of one hundred and twenty thousand infantry and twelve thousand horsemen. The trembling Jews saw the threatening danger coming fast upon them, and endeavoured by prayer and fasting to secure the favour of the God of Hosts. The proud Holofernes was enraged to think that they could be hardy enough to oppose his arms; and sent Achior, the captain of the Ammonites, bound in chains, into the city of Bethulia, there to await his doom with the inhabitants of the place, because Achior had told him that every effort to subdue the Israelites would be ineffectual, unless they had forfeited the protection of the God whom they adored. The Bethulians defended themselves with surprising vigour until Holofernes cut off the conduit, and possessed himself of the springs which supplied the town with water. Their courage then sank, and they insisted upon surrendering the city, until, prevailed upon by the tears and entreaties of Ozias, the commander, they agreed to wait five days longer.

There was in the place a woman of more than ordinary virtue, who felt herself called to make a generous effort for the good of the people. Her name was Judith, and she was

a widow. She proposed that she should go out to the camp of Holofernes with her maid-servant, the inhabitants praying during her absence that in five days the Lord would look down upon them. 'But,' she added, 'I desire that you search not into what I am doing, and till I bring you word let nothing else be done but to pray for me to the Lord our God.'

Her proposal being accepted, Judith first prayed to God and humbled herself before Him, and implored His assistance. Then she left the city.

On being asked by the watchmen of the Assyrians whence she came and whither she was going, she answered that she had fled from the city, and hoped to find mercy with them. Thereupon she was conducted to Holofernes in his tent; she found favour with him, and obtained leave to go out at night to pray.

On the fourth day Holofernes made a great supper for his servants. And when the feast was over and it had grown late, and all had retired to rest, Judith, who was in the tent where Holofernes was sleeping, ordered her maid to stand without before the chamber and to watch. She herself stood before the bed, praying with tears, and saying: 'Strengthen

me, O Lord God of Israel, in this hour !' Then she took the sword of Holofernes and cut off his head ; she took off the canopy from the pillars, and rolled away his headless body. After a while she went out and delivered the head of Holofernes to her maid, and bade her put it into her wallet. They both then went out according to their custom, as if it were to pray, and they went through the camp, and having compassed the valley, they came to the gate of the city.

And Judith cried to the watchmen upon the walls: 'Open the gates, for God is with us !' Entering into the city, she was met by all the people. She related to them what had occurred, and showed them the head of Holofernes. They all adored the Lord, and gave also praise to Judith. And Ozias, the prince of the people, said to her: 'Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth !'

At break of day the Bethulians hung up the head of Holofernes upon the walls, and came out with great noise and shouting. The Assyrians, finding the headless body of Holofernes, were seized with a great fear ; and having lost their commander, they were put to flight, and pursued by the Israelites. After

this signal triumph, Joachim the high priest came from Jerusalem to Bethulia with all the ancients to see Judith. And they all blessed her with one voice, saying: 'Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people. For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened because thou hast loved chastity. Therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed for ever.' And all the people said: 'So be it, so be it!' And they rejoiced exceedingly over the unexpected and glorious victory which they had obtained through Judith.

The human race has a proud and implacable enemy, who wants nothing less than that the whole world should be subjected to his sceptre. His power is great, and his name is legion. It is our duty to fight against this enemy. Many, alas! fall a prey to his fierce and unrelenting attacks. Some indeed come victorious out of the struggle; but after all they only overcome him partially, and at least have been in his power for a time. Mary alone has completely defeated the devil. As Judith cut off the head of Holofernes, so Mary in her Immaculate Conception crushed the head of

the infernal serpent, as it was foretold by God Himself: 'I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head' (Gen. iii.). On account of this unparalleled victory over Satan and sin, Mary is properly saluted by the Church as 'the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honour of our people.' The glory of Jerusalem—of the elect portion of the inheritance of the Lord, which she far surpasses in valour and in strength. The joy of Israel; that is, the joy of the Church of God, from which she has driven away the fear of the enemy by crushing his head. The honour of our people—of the faithful children of God, in whose numerous ranks she occupies the place of honour due to her, and in whose jubilant choirs she stands as Queen.

When Holofernes was slain by the valiant Judith, the enemies were routed. The Blessed Virgin has not only crushed the serpent's head, and put the devil to flight in her Immaculate Conception, but she has, moreover, retained her power over him. At the sight of this valiant Queen the devils still tremble and flee. And she on her part is still willing and ready to defend her people; her kindness and her love yet prompt her to oppose the

enemy, and to crush the head of the infernal serpent for our defence. She will fight for us in all dangers, in all calamities, by her powerful prayers: 'Sancta Maria, ora pro populo!' — 'Holy Mary, pray for the people!'

After Judith's triumph, Ozias, the prince of the nation, blessed her, saying: 'Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord, above all women upon the earth!' Mary was saluted with a similar greeting, and obtained a greater blessing, yea, the fulness of all blessings. The Angel sent by God Himself called her 'Full of grace,' and 'Blessed among women!' And the Blessed Virgin herself, inspired by the Holy Ghost, proclaimed that all generations would call her blessed. In her are confirmed and verified to their full extent the prophetic words which Isaac spoke to Jacob, saying: 'Cursed be he that curseth thee: and let him that blesseth thee be filled with blessings!' (Gen. xxvii. 29). Hence Idiota very well says: 'It is the will of thy Most Blessed Son, O Mary, that we should bless thee, His Mother and our Lady, at all times; and that thy praise should be in our mouth and heart day and night in prosperity and adversity; that we should constantly meditate upon thee, invoke thee, work in thy honour, give thee

thanks, relate thy life, and proclaim thy greatness !

We must bless Mary because she is the Mother of Jesus our Saviour, and because she has been instrumental in bringing about the defeat of our enemies. We must, however, also remember that her glorious calling and her exalted dignity made her the Queen of Martyrs and the Mother of Dolours ; and that her whole life was, as it were, but one great struggle against suffering and sorrow. The Church reminds us of this great truth in the Mass of the Seven Dolours of our Blessed Lady, the Epistle of which is taken from the Book of Judith, and runs as follows :

‘ The Lord hath blessed thee by His power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to nought. Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Blessed be the Lord Who made heaven and earth : because He hath so magnified thy name this day that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men, who shall be mindful of the power of the Lord for ever, for that thou hast not spared thy life by reason of the distress and tribulation of thy people, but hast prevented our ruin in the presence of our God.’



XXIV.

ESTHER.

'Quid vis Esther regina? Quæ est petitio tua?—
ESTHER V. 3.

'What wilt thou, Queen Esther? What is thy request?'

ABOUT the year 510 before Christ, the portion of the Jewish people who remained in captivity in the provinces of Babylon ran a great risk of being totally destroyed. The mighty Assuerus had a favourite courtier, whose name was Aman. Every mark of honour and royal favour was bestowed upon this wicked man, and all the king's servants about the palace were commanded to bend their knee to him. The king's court was then at Susan, where he took Esther, a daughter of the people of Israel, to be his wife and queen. All did homage to Aman, except Mardochai the Jew, uncle to

Esther, who was one of the captives whom Nabuchodonosor had carried away with King Jechonias to Babylon, and who had an apartment appointed him in the palace, because he had discovered a plot against the king's life. Aman was exceedingly angry to see Mardochai refuse him a homage which the other chief servants of the king servilely paid him; and knowing him to be a Jew, resolved that not only he but his whole nation should feel the weight of his resentment. He took an opportunity of falsely representing to the king, that the Jews were an insolent, lawless people, who by their religious tenets embroiled the state and disturbed the peace of his subjects; that it was not safe to let them live; and that for the good of the empire they ought to be utterly extirpated. The credulous Assuerus implicitly believed what his favourite told him, and gave him full power to act as he pleased in the matter. Aman had all that he wanted; he drew up an edict, to which he affixed the king's seal, and peremptorily commanded that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, every Jew throughout the Persian dominions should be massacred, without distinction of age or sex. The publication of this cruel order threw the Jews into the

utmost consternation; they saw no resource but in God, Whose mercy they implored by prayer and fasting. The Almighty, in His goodness, was pleased to provide for their safety by the means of Esther, the niece of Mardochai.

Esther had been chosen by Assuerus, from among all the women, to be queen. For he loved her, and she won his favour, and he set the royal crown upon her head. When she heard that her nation was doomed to destruction, Esther resolved to petition the king in their favour, at a very great risk to herself. For whosoever entered into the king's inner court without being called, was immediately put to death, unless the king held out his golden sceptre to him, in token of clemency.

Esther put on her royal apparel, and having called upon God, she took two maids with her, and entered into the court. Under a bright countenance, she hid a mind full of anguish and exceeding great fear. The king was sitting upon his royal throne, clothed with his royal robes, all glittering with gold and precious stones, and was terrible to behold. At this sight the queen turned pale, and sank down. But Assuerus in haste leaped from his throne, and holding her up in his arms, said,

‘What is the matter, Esther? I am thy brother; fear not. Thou shalt not die: for this law is not made for thee, but for all others. Come near then, and touch the sceptre.’ And when she had come to herself, the king inquired what she desired, saying: ‘What wilt thou, Queen Esther? what is thy request? if thou shouldst even ask one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee.’ She asked the king that he, and also Aman his courtier, would come to the banquet which she had prepared. The request was readily granted, and duly complied with. And when after the banquet the king reiterated his question, Esther asked that both he and Aman would again come to the banquet the following day, and that then she would open her mind.

On the second day, the king again addressed her after the banquet, saying: ‘What is thy petition, Esther, that it may be granted thee? and what wilt thou have done? Although thou ask the half of my kingdom, thou shalt have it.’ Then Esther, who had not before declared of what country and people she was, replied: ‘If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please thee, give me my life for which I ask, and my people for which I request.’ Upon Assuerus inquiring who it

was, that would take their lives, she answered :
'It is this Aman that is our adversary, and most wicked enemy.'

The result of Esther's endeavours was, that the decrees against the Jewish people were revoked, and that Aman was hanged on the gibbet which he had prepared for Mardochai.

There are many points of resemblance between Esther and the Blessed Virgin Mary ; but we will confine ourselves to the most conspicuous among them.

Esther pleased Assuerus so much that he loved her more than all other women ; he took her for his spouse, and made her queen. Similarly, our Blessed Lady was so pleasing to God, that He blessed her above all other women ; He chose her to be the Mother of His Beloved Son, and consequently made her Queen of the whole universe. St. Bernardine expresses this thought in the following terms : 'Mary is the true Esther, whom the King, that is, God, loved above all other women, above all other creatures. He placed the royal crown upon her head, and made her Queen.' Oh ! what an advantage, what a privilege it is for us to have so great, so excellent a Queen ! Let us with all our heart dedicate ourselves to the service of this Queen ;

let us honour her, and love her to the utmost of our power; for, as Richard of St. Lawrence says, she is not like other sovereigns who oppress their subjects with burdens and taxes; our Queen, on the contrary, enriches her servants with graces, merits, and rewards.

Assuerus said to Esther: 'Fear not, thou shalt not die; for this law is not made for thee, but for all others.' These words may be applied to Mary's Immaculate Conception, and her exemption from the general law of original sin. Holy Scripture, as Mary's adversaries say, includes all in the law of sin: why, then, do you make an exception in favour of the Blessed Virgin? St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans says: 'All have sinned; and do need the glory of God' (chap. iii.). And again: 'By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men' (chap. v.). If death passed upon all men, why not upon Mary? And if the Apostle declares that 'if one died for all, then all were dead' (2 Cor. v.), how can it be said that Mary did not die?

Among the arguments used in reply to this objection, there is one taken from Scripture itself, namely, that the word *all* must not be taken invariably to mean every single indi-

without exception. And this is illustrated in the history of Esther. Death was decreed against all those who entered into the king's inner court without being called. Yet Asbestos says to Esther: 'This law is not made for thee, but for all' ('Non pro te, sed pro omnibus'). If the law was not made for Esther, how was it for all? And if it was for all, how was it not for Esther? For this reason, that the queen enjoys the privileges of the king; and although she is subject to the law, the king grants her the privileges which he has himself.

Allusion is made to Mary's exemption from the general law of sin, in the Office of the Immaculate Conception, in these words: 'By one man sin entered into this world, in whom all have sinned. Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.'

What is thy petition, Esther, that it may be granted thee? and what wilt thou have done? Although thou ask the half of my kingdom, thou shalt have it.' St. Thomas comments on these words, says that the reign of Mary is the reign of mercy; and that

the same time our Judge. St. Bonaventure expresses beautifully the same idea in the words of the seventy-first Psalm: 'Give to the King Thy judgment, O God: and Thy mercy to the Queen His Mother.' And elsewhere* he says: 'Truly, O Lady, when I behold thee, I see nothing but mercy: having become the Mother of God for us miserable sinners, thou art also the Mother of Mercy, and thine is the office of commiseration.' St. Bernard addresses Mary thus: 'Thou art the Queen of Mercy; and who are the objects of mercy but those who are miserable? Thou hast the care of poor sinners; thou adoptest them for thy children, and therefore thou art called the Queen of Mercy. We miserable sinners will in consequence seek our consolation in thee and we wish to remain with thee.'

'Believe me,' says Cardinal Sfondratus, 'the tribunal of justice is fatal. Who can plead his cause there, and be declared innocent? The majesty of the judge, the greatness of the fault, the rigour of that justice which leaves nothing unpunished, are so many heads of accusation, sufficient for the condemnation even of the just, how much more of the sinner? Job, who was a simple

* *Stimuli amoris*, Pars III., cap. 19.

and upright man, fearing God and avoiding evil, being cited before that tribunal, exclaims: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and wilt consume me for the sins of my youth" (Job xiii. 26). As if he said: I thought my sins were long ago blotted out and forgotten; but I see that they are still written down against me; and not only are they written down, but so deeply imprinted in the mind of the judge that it looks as if he had nothing else but them to remember, and meditates in consequence a bitter sentence against me. And for what sins? Alas! for the sins of my youth; not for murders or adulteries, but for transgressions which appeared slight, and which I thought effaced by my tears and my sufferings!

But Mary's kingdom is the kingdom of mercy. Whosoever loves her belongs to the reign of mercy, and shall not perish. He will say to the Lord: 'Enter not into judgment with Thy servant' (Ps. cxlii.), 'O Lord! I am Mary's servant; I appeal to the tribunal of mercy! Let Mary, the Queen of Mercy, judge my cause!'

It is a common opinion that the suppliant power of Mary in heaven is so great that she can obtain all she desires. We may, however,

go still further, and say with Albertus Magnus, Bishop of Ratisbon, that the veneration of Jesus for His Blessed Mother is so great that He does not wait to be asked by her. He is the first to speak, and to express the desire of knowing her wishes. And this is insinuated, he says, in the history of Esther. For Assuerus did not wait until Esther spoke; but he leaped from his throne and said: 'What wilt thou, Queen Esther? what is thy request?'

Mary being our Queen, a powerful and merciful Queen, let us, as St. Alphonsus says, constantly have recourse to her if we wish to secure our salvation. She pleads for us in the words of Esther: 'If I have found favour in thy sight, O my King and my God, give me my people for whom I request. If, O Lord, Thou lovest me, pardon those sinners for whom I supplicate.' Therefore, as the Saint adds, if the sight of our sins discourage and terrify us, let us remember that God has made Mary the Queen of Mercy in order that she may save by her intercession the greatest and most abandoned sinners who recommend themselves to her prayers,



XXV.

THE FOUNTAIN.

'Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus.'—CANT. vi. 12.

'My sister, my spouse is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.'



ATER is not only a very useful element, but it also often becomes a beautiful ornament in our parks and gardens. What is more desirable for the thirsty traveller than a spring of clear water? What is more delightful to the eye in the midst of verdure and foliage than a limpid and graceful fountain?

Mary is a mystical fountain; the fountain of gardens (Cant. iv. 15), the spring of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Libanus. It is in this sense that the commentators speak; among others Cornelius a Lapide says: 'Mary was, and still is, the fountain of living waters.'

The Blessed Virgin Mary was a most clear and limpid fountain in her origin, which was entirely pure and immaculate, and wholly free from the muddiness of sin. She was a sealed fountain, which the enemy could never reach in order to disturb or poison it. And by whom was this fountain sealed but by God Himself? or as St. Jerome expresses it: 'Sealed with the seal of the Holy Trinity.' Sealed by God the Father in quality of His most beloved Daughter; sealed by God the Son as His dearest Mother; sealed by God the Holy Ghost as His purest Spouse. This is the seal of the King which no one dares to break, which the enemy must respect; and God preserved the integrity of this seal from all the efforts of the devil. The immaculate Virgin, the mystical fountain, thus springing up clearer than crystal at her origin, was an object of delight to the angels of heaven, who were filled with admiration at the sight of her matchless purity.

The Blessed Virgin was a sealed fountain, not only in her Immaculate Conception, but also and especially in her Annunciation, and the Incarnation of the Son of God. Oh wonder unheard of, and ineffable mystery! God is born from a daughter of Adam! Mary is

a Mother without ceasing to be a Virgin! Who is not filled with admiration, considering the manner in which she becomes the Mother of God? An angel brings her the Divine message; and at her humble reply: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word,' the Son of God becomes her Son, and she becomes really and truly His Mother.

St. Bonaventure, briefly describing this joyful mystery, says:

*'Gaude Virgo, Mater Christi,
Quæ per aurem concepisti,
Gabriele nuntio.'*

'Glad tidings are from heaven brought;
A wonder is in Mary wrought:
At Gabriel's word she does conceive.'

Having thus conceived the Son of God in a miraculous manner by the operation of the Holy Ghost, Mary brought forth Jesus, not in sorrow and pain, but with unspeakable joy. She did not lose her virginity, but remained as she was before, a pure Virgin, a sealed fountain. On some of our Lady's feasts, this fact is mentioned in the Mass in these words: 'O Lord, may the humanity of Thy only-begotten Son succour us, Who being born of a

Virgin, did not diminish but consecrate the integrity of His Mother.'

Father Michael Pexen-Felder, S.J., very aptly remarks that Mary is called a sealed fountain on account of her virginity and integrity, and her immunity from the filthiness of sin; but not as if that fountain were closed to us, and we were to be deprived of the waters of that most pure spring which is never dry, never exhausted. Mary is, then, to us a fountain, and a most abundant source of the purest water.

But the water cannot issue from a spring unless the spring itself be first entirely filled. This was the case with the Mother of God; for from the first moment of her existence she received so great an abundance of graces, that they far exceeded those of all the angels and saints. The Angelic Doctor gives the following arguments in support of this assertion. In the first place, Mary was more intimately united to Christ, the Author of grace, than even the angels. It is true that at the beginning of her life she was not united with God in the same manner as after the Incarnation; but it suffices that she was destined to be the Mother of God. Moreover, the first graces which she received were the founda-

tions of her sanctity. Now, the foundations of Mary's holiness are more noble and more perfect than the summit of the holiness of the saints. We may add to this that at the first moment of her life God loved the Blessed Virgin more than any angel or saint, because she was elected to be the Mother of Jesus. And as He loved her more, He also gave her more abundant graces, according to the principle of St. Thomas: 'To those whom God loves more, He gives more grace.'

All the gifts of grace that have been given to the other saints, have been granted by the Almighty more perfectly and more completely to the Blessed Virgin Mary; therefore, no creature, however holy, can be compared to the Mother of God. St. Bernard, speaking on this subject, says: 'There is no virtue which does not shine forth in thee; and whatsoever graces the saints have obtained individually, thou alone didst possess them all.' And St. Jerome: 'To others grace is given in a certain measure; but in Mary the fulness of grace is poured out.' Idiota addresses our Blessed Lady in these words: 'O Mary, thou hast received every privilege, and no saint is equal to thee; no one is above thee but God.'

What, however, renders this fulness of grace more admirable is, that the Mother of God did not only possess all those virtues in which some or other saints have excelled, but she possessed them in a much higher degree. 'Attentive consideration,' says St. Bernard, 'will show you that Mary possessed in a singular manner those virtues which at first sight she appeared to have in common with other saints.' There is nothing surprising in this. For does it not seem reasonable that the Queen should be adorned with more numerous and more precious ornaments than the servants and subjects? So abundant were the graces which Mary received, that she was not only entirely free from all sin, but also from all disposition to sin and proneness to evil. Hence our Blessed Lady is declared to be 'full of grace,' as full of grace as a creature can be, a source entirely replete with the waters of grace.

In the book of Esther it is recorded that Mardochai had a dream, or vision, in which he saw a little fountain, which grew into a very great river, and abounded into many waters (chapter xi.). This we may, with St. Antonine, Richard of St. Laurence, and others, apply to the Blessed Virgin. 'Mary,' they

say, 'was a little fountain by her humility, and hence she grew into a very great river.' Our Blessed Lady herself declares this in the beautiful words of her canticle: 'He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call Me blessed.' The little fountain grew into a very great river when the treasures of mercy and goodness which the heart of Mary contained, were spread all over the world like an abundant stream. 'The stream of the river maketh the city of God joyful' (Ps. xlv.). Although the whole world, as St. Bonaventure writes in this psalm of our Blessed Lady, is full of Mary's benefits, the city of God—that is, the Church of God—is especially favoured in this respect. For Mary, the Mother of Grace, is by a special title the Mother of the Faithful.

If we have a claim on the waters of the stream of blessings which flow from Mary, let us endeavour to know and understand our wants. Of ourselves we have nothing. Left to ourselves we perish, like plants that wither, far away from the source and the stream of refreshing water. Let us, then, seek grace; and let us seek it through Mary, who is the fountain and the channel of grace, in order that

through her we may obtain whatever graces we want from our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us go to Mary, for our weakness and ignorance are so great, that we do not even know what graces to ask, nor do we understand our own interests; and well might we be addressed with the words of Holy Scripture: 'You know not what you ask' (Matt. xx.). But the Mother of God is solicitous for our welfare, and will obtain for us the graces we stand in need of. Why, then, do we not address ourselves to Mary? Why do we not draw water from that spiritual fountain?

It is not enough for a weary and thirsty traveller, who desires to quench his thirst, to sit down by the fountain, he must draw water and drink. So it is with us: it is not enough for us to have a good and kind Mother, to be near the ever-flowing fountain of grace: we must drink. And how is this to be done? By a sincere and practical devotion to the Blessed Virgin; by assiduously recommending ourselves to her care; by placing all our petitions, all our desires, yea, our very selves in her loving hands. In this manner we shall draw water from the source of grace. We shall then experience how kind, how sweet Mary is; and we shall understand the truth of

the words of Ecclesiasticus, applied by the Church to our Blessed Lady: 'They that eat me shall yet hunger, and they that drink me shall yet thirst.' And in the midst of the fatigue of our laborious pilgrimage here below, we shall say to Mary with St. Bonaventure: 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul thirsteth after thy love' (Ps. xli.).

Let us address the Mother of God with the learned and pious Idiota :

'Thou art an accessible fountain, O Blessed Virgin Mary, open both to thy friends, and to the penitents by thy mercy and love, and ministering unto them the abundance of grace. Thou art a spring, watering all the surface of the earth (Gen. ii. 16), a spring from which the sinners can at all times draw the water of grace. Thou art a fountain sealed by the Blessed Trinity. A sealed fountain, because through thee the Incarnation of the Son of God remained concealed from the devil. Thou art the fountain of Siloe, whose waters flow in silence; thy benefits gently flow to whomsoever, and whensoever thou wilt. And as a spring both ascends and descends, so thou didst descend by humility, and thou wast exalted by God above all creatures. As a little

fountain is known afar off by the waters which flow from it, so thou, O most clement Virgin, art little by thy profound humility, but thou art known everywhere by the abundant blessings which thou bestowest on all who invoke thee. As a fountain reveals the water which before was hidden in the earth, so through thee, O most sweet Virgin, the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared, Who before was to us a hidden God. Thou, O most pious Virgin, art properly called "a Spring"; for as a spring issues cool water at all times, so by thy kindness the fire of our passions is cooled, and the cold hearts of the sinners are warmed. From thee, O blessed fountain, flow abundant streams of grace, refreshing all those who draw water with humility.

'O fountain of love and mercy, fountain of sweetness and clemency, water the dry and sterile soil of my heart! May thy stream of grace flow towards me, a most guilty sinner! May it wash out the stains of my sins, that, being made pure, I may for ever rejoice in the happy fruition of the inexhaustible Source of Life!'



XXVI.

THE GATE.

'Alma Redemptoris Mater, quæ pervia cæli Porta manes.'—HERMANNUS CONTRACTUS.

'Kind Mother of our Saviour, thou art the open Gate of Heaven.'

BOTH in the Litany of Loreto, and in the Office of the Church, our Blessed Lady is called 'the Gate of Heaven.' A multitude of saints have made use of this title. Thus, St. John Damascene calls her 'the Heavenly Gate,' and 'the Virginal Gate'; St. Ildefonse, 'the Gate of Heaven'; St. Peter Damian, 'the Gate of Paradise'; St. Anselm, 'the Gate of Salvation,' etc.

A door or gate serves for two purposes, for people can both go in, and come out by it.

Mary is, then, properly called a gate, because through her Jesus Christ our Saviour came

from heaven into this world. 'Thou art the gate of the Great King' (*Tu Regis Alti janua*), as we read in our Lady's Office. Let us pause awhile before this wonderful Gate of Heaven, by which God came down upon earth. Surely, when we consider the circumstances of the coming of Christ, we cannot but exclaim with the Apostle: 'O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!' (Rom. xi. 33). Could the Son of God not come on earth in the same manner in which He made the first man? Could He not do for Himself what He did for Adam? Could He not spare Himself the humble state and the helplessness of infancy? If He had appeared suddenly among the people at the age of manhood, in the bloom of youth, would He not then have convinced them better of His Divinity, and converted them all to His doctrine? It was certainly very easy for our Blessed Redeemer to use these means; but He would not. He chose to enter into the world by the ordinary gate of all mankind. He wished to be born of a Mother, and to become like unto us (in order to be our model), in all things, except in sin. He became a little child for us, and was help-

less, and cried like other infants. But what happiness for Mary to be His Mother! She is indeed a 'Happy Gate of Heaven,' *Felix cæli porta*. It is true she brought Jesus forth in a stable, in a rigorous season, in the middle of the night, and laid Him on a little straw. But how different are the joys of heaven from the pleasures of earth! In the midst of poverty and privation Mary becomes the happy Mother of the great Creator, the happy Gate of Heaven; and the Angels sing the joyful hymn: 'Gloria in excelsis Deo!'

As our Saviour Jesus Christ was introduced into this world through the Blessed Virgin Mary, she is properly compared to a gate; but she is a closed gate, and commonly understood to be represented by the gate of which Ezechiel says: 'This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it' (Ezech. xliv. 2). These words are taken from the prophecy of Ezechiel, who was one of the captives that were carried away to Babylon. The temple of Jerusalem lay then in ruins. In a vision the prophet was shown the rebuilding of it, and the details of the various parts thereof. The Angel brought him to the gate of the inner court that looked

towards the east. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came in by the way of the east ; and the earth shone with His majesty. And the majesty of the Lord went into the temple by the gate that looked to the east. When Ezechiel had seen the dimensions of the inner court and of the altar, the Angel brought him back to the east gate, and it was shut. And he said to him : ‘ This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it ; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it ; and it shall be shut for the prince ; the prince himself shall sit in it.’

Cornelius a Lapide says that all the Fathers and commentators have interpreted this passage with reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary ; some even hold that it must be understood of her in the literal sense. This closed gate, as he explains, is our Blessed Lady, in whom the Prince sat ; that is, Christ, whose Mother she became. The Lord, the God of Israel, entered in by her : God the Father by making her in a manner His Spouse ; God the Holy Ghost by overshadowing her ; God the Son by becoming her Son. She is the Daughter, the Mother, and the Spouse of God.

‘ Who is meant by the east gate which

Ezekiel describes,' asks St. Ambrose, 'but Mary? A closed gate because she is a virgin. She is the gate by which Christ entered into this world, His Mother remaining a virgin.' And St. Augustine says: 'The closed gate represents Mary's virginity, which was not lost but sanctified by the birth of Jesus Christ.'

To those who find some difficulty in admitting that our Blessed Lady, though the Mother of our Saviour, was yet a virgin, we will say with St. Gregory: 'If there are wonderful facts relating to our Lord, which we cannot understand in themselves, we must compare them with some other of His miracles in order that, by the consideration of some of the marvels which He wrought, we may be guided in the belief of others.' He then remarks that the same Body which was born of the Blessed Virgin entered into the room where the disciples were assembled, the doors being shut. The same sacred Body also went out of the sepulchre through the rock, for the sepulchre was closed and guarded, and a great stone had been placed before the entrance. Now, if we believe these astonishing facts, why should we find any difficulty in admitting that the Blessed Mother of the same Jesus remained a virgin?

Galatinus remarks that it is said three times of the gate of Ezechiel that it shall be shut, in order to show the virginity of our Blessed Lady before the birth of Christ, at His birth, and after His birth.

The east gate is also a symbol of Mary's Immaculate Conception ; for in her origin she was as a gate closed to the devil, who could not gain access to her soul. And as no one was allowed to enter by that gate, as it was treated with so much respect because of the passage of God's glory, so the Blessed Virgin was sanctified, not for her own sake, but on account of the infinite majesty and holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Cornelius a Lapide beautifully describes and explains the use of this gate : ' It shall be shut to the prince ; the prince himself shall sit in it.' When the prince wished to offer a sacrifice, he had to remain in this gate, where he also had to eat of the peace-offerings ; but he was not allowed to enter through it. The prince, being God's representative in temporal matters, had the privilege of approaching nearer to the court of the priests than the people, and was allowed to see the sacrifices from this gate, which was by privilege opened for him. That such was the use of this gate is plainly

described in the beginning of the 46th chapter, where it is said that it 'shall be shut the six days on which work is done, but on the sabbath-day it shall be opened. And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate from without, and he shall stand on the threshold of the gate: and the priests shall offer his holocaust and his peace-offerings: and he shall adore upon the threshold of the gate, and shall go out; but the gate shall not be shut till the evening.' And again in the 12th verse: 'When the prince shall offer a voluntary holocaust, or voluntary peace-offerings to the Lord, the gate that looketh towards the east shall be opened to Him, and he shall offer his holocaust and his peace-offerings, as it is wont to be done on the sabbath-day.'

The prince, sitting in this gate on the sabbath-day, which is the day of rest, is a beautiful figure of the Son of God, the Prince of heaven, taking His rest in Mary. When the prince wanted to make a peace-offering, he remained in this gate; so Jesus took up His abode in Mary when, coming in quality of Saviour and Prince of Peace, He established peace between God and man.

On the sabbath-day the gate was not to be closed until evening, in order that, as St.

Jerome explains, after the prince all the people might adore at the threshold of this gate. We may in a similar manner go to God and adore Him at the threshold of this gate—that is, through Mary; and through her we shall have an easy access to her Divine Son.

The Blessed Virgin is properly represented by the east gate of the temple, for she is the gate of the temple of God's grace and glory. As the Son of God came down from heaven by this gate, it must not appear surprising that all the graces which God sends down from heaven should also come to us by this gate.

Let us endeavour to enter heaven by the gate by which Jesus came to us. Our Blessed Lady is the gate of heaven to us, and an open gate, because she is always willing to help those who implore her assistance. She is an open gate, because through her poor sinners can, whenever they please, have access to God and be reconciled with Him. Whosoever, therefore, loves eternal life, whosoever desires eternal happiness, whosoever wishes to enter into eternal joy, let him go to the door, let him go to Mary, who is the gate of paradise.

In order that the Blessed Virgin may properly fill the office of gate of heaven in our

regard, God has given her great power. For she is not an inanimate gate like the material gates here on earth; she is not merely a means of entering; but she is a door which helps us to enter. She conducts her clients into heaven. She guides all those who have recourse to her with confidence, humility, and perseverance. She takes sinners by the hand, and leads them away from the path of crime. She confirms the steps of the just in the way of virtue, and obtains for them the grace of final perseverance, which will introduce them into the temple of God's glory. 'Mary,' says St. Alphonsus, 'is called the gate of heaven because no one can enter heaven except by her, since it is through her that we obtain the graces which enable us to arrive there.' And St. Bonaventure: 'No one can enter heaven but by Mary, who is the gate.'

But are we fit to pass through the gate of heaven into which nothing that is defiled can enter? Whosoever knows and loves Mary, should here acknowledge his unworthiness and his guilt. How often have we, by our ingratitude, our infidelity, our offences against her Divine Son, closed this heavenly gate to ourselves? Let us, then, address our Blessed

Lady with the words of the Canticle, and say to her : 'Open to me, O my sister !' Or rather : 'Open to me, O my Mother, for thy kindness is greater than my unworthiness !' And with Idiota : 'Open to me the gate of thy mercy and love, that having entered therein, I may be free from all evil !'



XXVII.

THE STAR.

*'Ave, maris stella,
Dei Mater alma!'*

HYMN OF VESP.

*'Hail, Star of the sea,
Kind Mother of God!'*

AMONG the meanings of the holy Name of Mary is that of 'Star of the sea.' Many authors have thus interpreted it, even in very remote times. It is mentioned by St. Jerome, and also by Eusebius Emyssenus, who says: 'The Magi came to Bethlehem, the star stood over the house in which the Blessed Virgin was; the star stood over the star, for Mary is interpreted Star of the sea.'

But besides being an interpretation of her name, the star of the sea is also a symbol of our Blessed Lady. The Church salutes her with the words: 'Ave maris stella!'—'Hail,

Star of the sea !' And many saints have addressed her in similar terms.

Mary's figurative title of 'Star of the sea' reminds us that the sea is an image of this world. This comparison, which is so often used now, has also been frequently made by the Saints. In his homily on the twenty-first chapter of St. John's Gospel, St. Gregory says : ' It may be asked why after our Lord's resurrection, the disciples being in the ship, He appeared to them standing on the shore. We shall soon discover the reason if we look at the mystical meaning. For what does the sea represent but this world, which is kept in constant motion by accidents and disturbances, the waves of this corruptible life ? And what is meant by the firmness of the shore but the perpetuity of eternal rest ? Hence, as the disciples were still exposed to the waves of this mortal life, they were toiling at sea.'

The world is a sea, and we who are sailing on it are exposed to many dangers. This sea is filled with monsters ; it has its reefs and sandbanks ; and we have to face the perils of storms and shipwreck : perils of temptation, and sin, and the eternal loss of our soul. St. Bernard says that Mary is a bright and glorious star, necessarily elevated above this

great and spacious sea. He says she is necessarily elevated : for the stars are far distant from our planet, and their place is in the firmament of heaven. The Blessed Virgin is necessarily elevated above the sea of this world by her exalted dignity—a dignity to which no angel, or archangel, or any other creature can aspire. A dignity conferred upon Mary by the Almighty; and He Who called her to that dignity also did great things to her, and exalted her above all creatures.

Mary is a beautiful star necessarily elevated above the great and tempestuous sea of this world, because for her there were no sea-monsters, no storms, no rocks; she could not suffer shipwreck. We have all been wrecked; even the Saints have fallen into the ocean of original sin. The hand of the almighty and merciful God has saved us; and it is the same God Who prevented Mary from suffering shipwreck. 'God,' as we read in the Office of the Immaculate Conception, 'created her in justice, and took hold of her hand, and preserved her.'

Mary, according to St. Bernard, is a brilliant star, not only on account of her dignity and merits, but also by her illustrious examples. She is a star elevated above the ocean of this

world by her exalted virtues, and the eminent example of her holy life. The Saints have excelled in one or other virtue: Mary possessed them all. The Saints are honoured, and their noble and heroic actions remembered in one or other particular church or country: Mary's life is known and commemorated all over the world. Hence we properly sing in our Lady's Office that 'Her glorious life throws its light over the whole world;' and that 'Her most holy life adorns all the churches.'

St. Bernard further describes Mary's name and title of 'Star of the sea' in the following terms:

'The name of Mary is interpreted "Star of the sea," and it is most properly given to the Virgin-Mother. She is most appropriately compared to a star, for as the star sends forth its ray without injury to itself, so the Blessed Virgin brings forth her Son without injury to her virginity. The ray going out from the star does not diminish its brightness, nor does the Son diminish the Virgin's integrity.'

It is in the nature of a star to emit rays. Our Blessed Lady therefore is properly compared to a star, since she has sent forth an unsurpassed ray of light, the Eternal, the Uncreated Light itself, Jesus Christ, the Son

of God, Light of Light. Through this star, Mary, the Eternal Light has become visible to us. Before the Blessed Virgin sent Him as a ray to us, we could not behold Him; for no one can see God and live. But Mary sent Him forth as a ray, when He became man, hiding His divinity under the veil of the human nature; and we saw Him as a ray of light, proportioned to the limited power of our mortal eyes.

The light, or rays, which the stars send forth, is produced in a very different manner from that in which light is obtained here on earth. The substances which produce light here are consumed by process of time. Light a lamp, and leave it untouched; it will burn brightly for a while; then the flame will diminish, and at length it goes out. The stars, on the contrary, send forth their rays without detriment to themselves, and their splendour is not thereby diminished. This is a beautiful figure of Mary's perpetual virginity. Our Blessed Lady becomes a Mother, and remains a Virgin. She unites the ineffable joys of the Divine Maternity with the honour and glory of virginity.

It has been from olden times, and still is, the custom among sailors to look to the stars for

guidance. And what other means have they to know where they are, or to make their way to the port? Around them they see nothing but the wide expanse of the ocean, on the surface of which there is not a single object whereby they may direct their course. They must then look up to the heavens, and consider the star of the sea. If this star disappear, if a storm arise and hide it from their view, they are exposed to the most imminent dangers. Oh, how often, when human help fails, and human hope is lost, do the sailors call upon the Mother of God! And how often are they assisted by this spiritual Star of the sea, even in their temporal necessities! This consideration makes an eloquent priest* exclaim :

‘ Ask our sailors who have made long and perilous voyages, how they have frequently escaped the fury of the storms, and happily arrived in the desired haven. Ask them how they have obtained the favourable wind which wafted their vessel on to the shores of their native land. The numerous chapels and oratories erected on the beach, filled with offerings and other tokens of devotion and

* The parish priest of Fourmies, diocese of Cambrai.

gratitude to the Mother of God, will answer in their stead. When the ship is caught in a storm ; when the darkness of night descends upon the scene, to be broken only by the glare of the lightning ; when the thunder rolls, and the wind whistles through the rigging ; when the mast trembles, and the helm no longer obeys the hand that moves it ; when heavy seas sweep over the deck—the voice of the sailor cries to heaven, on which his look is fixed, and he invokes the Star of the sea. Expecting no longer any earthly assistance, he puts all his hope in Mary. She becomes his beacon, his helm, his mast, and his sail ; and when the vessel founders, his last plank of salvation.

‘ It is true, O Mary, that thou often savest the sailor from the waves of the sea, and herein I admire thy goodness. But I admire it far more when I consider how often thou savest from eternal shipwreck the spiritual sailors in distress on the ocean of this life.’

Help me then, O Star of the sea, for I am exposed to many dangers on the sea of this world ! Calm the tempests ; and direct my course, that I may safely arrive at the port of salvation !

•

*Vitam præsta puram,
Iter para tutum ;
Ut videntes Jesum,
Semper collætémur !*

Pray that our life may spotless be ;
Here on our journey leave us never,
That one day we may Jesus see,
And live with Him and thee for ever !



XXVIII.

THE MOON.

'Tu pulchra ut luna diceris, eique non immerito compararis.'—ST. BERN. DEPREC.

'Thou art called fair as the moon, and to her thou art properly compared.'

GOD, as we read in the Book of Genesis, made two lights in the firmament of heaven, which should have a special influence upon our planet: the greater light, that is the sun, to rule the day; and the lesser light, namely, the moon, to rule the night. And He also placed the stars in the heavens.

In an allegorical sense, the firmament is the Church; the sun is Christ; the moon is the Blessed Virgin Mary; and the stars are the Saints.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is properly represented by the sun. He is frequently called 'the Sun of justice.' This Sun enlighteneth

every man that cometh into this world. And as the sun is to the earth the source of warmth and light, so Jesus is the Source of all our grace.

In the moon we have a beautiful figure of our Blessed Lady. Consider the heavens on a clear night. Thousands of golden stars twinkle in the deep blue firmament, but our eyes are especially attracted by the moon, who sheds her soft silvery light on us, and before whose brilliant lustre the stars turn pale. In the firmament of the Church the splendour of Mary's grace and holiness is so great that it far surpasses and almost effaces the light of the Saints who surround her. The Saints, as so many stars, all contribute to the beauty of this mystical firmament; but Mary is its greatest and brightest ornament.

The moon has no light of herself; she derives it all from the sun. It is just so with the Blessed Virgin, who is fair as the moon; yea, more beautiful, for she is all fair, and there is not a spot in her. But however great the brightness of her virtues and her glory is, she had from her own self no grace, no privilege. All good gifts came to her, like to all others, from above, from the Father of lights. The Saints understood this, and never gloried

in any of God's gifts as springing from themselves. The Blessed Virgin having received more graces, more light, than any of the Saints, also understood far better than they did, that these blessings were all presents granted to her by the Giver of all good gifts. She not only acknowledged this in her heart, but proclaimed it to the world, saying: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me.'

When the moon receives the bright light which comes to her from the sun, she does not absorb it, but reflects it and sends it on to the earth. Such is also the nature of Mary's office with regard to us. Not only does she shed upon us the brilliant light of her eminent example, and of the practice of all the virtues which God had infused into her pure soul; she, moreover, exerts all her good qualities in our behalf, and uses all the privileges which the Almighty has conferred upon her, especially that of the Divine Maternity, as means to obtain graces for us from God; and thus she truly becomes, as the Apostle says, 'all to all.'

The brilliancy of the moon is very different from that of the sun; it is far less intense.

The sun is absolutely necessary to us: his light and his heat are indispensable to our planet. But his brightness is so great that our eyes cannot bear it; if we look fixedly at him we are dazzled and blinded. The moon, on the contrary, being far less brilliant, and only receiving her light from the sun, and consequently enlightening the earth in a lesser degree, is more proportioned to our sight: we can behold her, and consider her at leisure without injury to our eyes. There is a similar difference between our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who is truly God, and our Blessed Lady, who is a mere creature. As the light and warmth of the sun are indispensable to the earth, so our soul could not live without the grace and the merits of our Blessed Redeemer. At the same time when we consider His sublime example, and His life wholly Divine, in which even His bitterest enemies found nothing to blame, we say to ourselves: He was God, and consequently could not commit any sin; He could not make the least mistake, nor do anything reprehensible. He is our Divine model: we must, then, always strive to become more perfect; but we cannot pretend to copy that exalted type, or in any way to approach it. Mary, on the contrary,

is a mere creature, and although she was favoured by God in a special manner, and we shall never be able to equal the example of her life and virtues either, still, her actions being those of a mere creature, her virtues the virtues of a creature, they appear to us easier to imitate. In Mary we see what a creature is capable of with the grace of God. And let no man say that the consideration and imitation of Mary's example will lead us away from our Divine model; for we know that without Jesus Mary would not be what she is. If we compare our Saviour to the sun, and the Blessed Virgin to the moon, we cannot but see that, as without the sun the moon would give no light, since she obtains all her light from the sun, so Mary could not enlighten us if God's grace had not first shone upon her. But we must also admit that if Mary followed Jesus more closely, and more perfectly than any other creature, it is evident that the imitation of Mary is of necessity also the imitation of Jesus Christ.

The moon exercises a great influence upon the earth. It is true this influence is not so great as that of the sun, but it far exceeds that of all the stars. Thus the motion of the sea, known as the tides, is caused by the moon.

The influence of the Blessed Virgin upon the inhabitants of the earth is similarly great, and exceeds that of all the Saints. Her eyes are constantly fixed on us, and she is ever solicitous for our welfare. She distributes God's graces, and excites in our hearts holy desires and sentiments of gratitude, compunction, sorrow, and love. James de Voragine, comparing the tides as caused by the moon to the manner in which Mary acts upon the earth, says : ' From Mary, as from the moon, proceeds the flow of grace when she pours the blessings of God out upon us ; and also the ebb when she teaches us to refer it all back to God by our gratitude for His benefits.'

' But,' you will say, ' the moon has changes or phases ; how does this apply to our Blessed Lady ? Surely she was always united to God, and never turned away from Him.' The Blessed Virgin was confirmed in grace from the first moment of her existence ; and consequently that change, which consists in turning from good to evil, from God to sin, could not be found in her. As regards grace, there was no loss or decrease in her, and hence she is called a full and a perfect moon ; or as Richard of St. Laurence describes her from the eighty-eighth Psalm : His throne ' as the

moon perfect for ever.' The same author, however, also compares the Mother of God to the moon in her phases: 'As the moon,' he says, 'constantly increases or decreases, and diminishes after her increase, and increases after her decrease, so as Mary increased in grace, she decreased by humility in her own estimation, according to the words of Ecclesiasticus: "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God."' Idiota expresses the same opinion, saying: 'As the moon increases and decreases, so Mary increased and decreased; she increased from virtue to virtue; she decreased by humility in her own estimation; for the greater she was, the more she humbled herself in order that she might find grace before God.'

Another phenomenon which we observe in the moon is the eclipse. Here again the authors find a similitude between the moon and our Blessed Lady. It is true that James de Voragine calls her 'A moon never eclipsed'; and Ernest of Prague: 'A moon never deficient nor eclipsed, even when she stood by the Cross.' But she is commonly described by other authors as having been eclipsed at the Passion and Death of Christ. Thus Richard

of St. Laurence says: 'She was eclipsed at the Passion of her Son when she was, as it were, changed into blood through the sufferings of Jesus ; according to Joël : "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood."' The sun was darkened when Jesus, the Sun of justice, hid His divinity under the anguish and pain of the most ignominious death. The moon was changed into blood when a sword of sorrow pierced Mary's heart by the compassion which she felt for her beloved Son. Albertus Magnus is of the same opinion: 'This moon,' he says, 'was entirely changed into blood when, standing by the Cross, Mary beheld her Son, with His head wounded by the thorns, His body torn by the scourges, His hands and feet pierced with nails, and at last His side opened by the cruel lance.'

In these very circumstances, however, they all agree that she filled the office of the moon in this sense, that, as the moon shines upon the earth in the absence of the sun, so Mary, when the Sun of justice passed out of this world to the Father by death, enlightened the Church by her faith, during the three days which He passed in the tomb.

Ecclesiasticus, in his description of the moon, points out that 'From the moon is the festival

day.' The moon ruled the feasts of the Jews. On every new moon they kept the festival called 'Neomenia.' The Pasch also, from which all the other feasts were counted, fell on the day of the full moon, which was the fourteenth day of the month Nisan. Richard of St. Laurence describes Mary as 'The moon from which is counted the festival day of eternity.' And properly so, for all our joy comes from Jesus through Mary. The festivities of this world are transitory and vain; but from Mary we count the beginning of our true feasts, which consist in rejoicing in the Lord. 'Mary,' says the same author, 'showed us the commencement of this feast, by despising all that is temporal, and delighting only in heavenly things. From her is born Jesus, Who is our joy here, giving us peace of heart, purity of conscience, and rest from the servile works of sin, and Who will hereafter celebrate, with His elect, an eternal solemnity.' As Eve gave the signal of mourning and weeping, so Mary gave that of joy and feasting.

The moon shines at night. The darkness of night represents the unhappy state of poor sinners. They are deprived of the light of God's grace and friendship; the Sun of justice has set for them. But we may also speak

more generally, and say that the life of man here below is a night. If not the night of sin, as it is to so many unhappy souls, we must nevertheless all say with the Apostle: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner' (1 Cor. xiii.). In this darkness we are exposed to many dangers. Oh, what joy for the poor traveller who has to proceed on his journey at night, to see that the moon is shining in the firmament! What joy for us, poor pilgrims here below, who travel in the gloom of this mortal life, to know that the mystical moon, Mary, is shining in the heavens, enlightening us, and guiding our steps!

Let us therefore say with Bernardine de Busto: 'O Mary, thou art fair as the moon. As the moon shines at night, and shows the way to the traveller, so thou cheerest this dark vale of tears. Thou bringest back those that err, and showest miserable sinners the way to their eternal home.'

'O bright moon,' exclaims Idiota, 'O Mary, I am proceeding on my way in a dark night, surrounded by the gloom of my sins. Help me, and shed thy light on my heart. Guide me on my journey, show me the snares of the enemy, so that, progressing on the road of the Divine commandments, I may happily reach the end of my pilgrimage!'



XXIX.

THE ROD OF JESSE.

'Virga Jesse floruit : virgo Deum et hominem genuit.'—MISSA ANNUN.

'The rod of Jesse hath blossomed : a virgin hath brought forth God and man.'

THE mystery which is hidden in the symbolic Rod of Jesse, described by the prophet Isaias, was less clearly foreshadowed seven hundred years before by the Rod of Aaron. God had chosen Aaron and his sons, from among the children of Israel, to minister unto Him in the office of the priesthood. This election, against which some of the people murmured, was confirmed by a great miracle. At God's command Moses took twelve rods, which he received from the princes of the twelve tribes of Israel, and also the rod of Aaron, representing the tribe of Levi, and laid them up before the Lord in the

tabernacle. He returned the following day, and found the rods of the twelve tribes as he had left them; but the rod of Aaron had budded, and was covered with leaves and fruits. Moses brought the rods out of the tabernacle, and gave them to the people; but, by order of God, the rod of Aaron was taken back, that it might be kept for a monument.

‘What,’ asks St. Bernard, ‘did the rod of Aaron signify, but that a virgin would bring forth, knowing not man? The meaning of the great miracle of this rod blooming without root or moisture, is more plainly indicated by the prophet Isaias, who says: “There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.” By the rod he indicates the Virgin, and by the flower Him Whom she brings forth.’* And elsewhere† he says: ‘I clearly see who is the rod coming forth from the root of Jesse; and also Who is the flower upon which the Spirit of the Lord rests. The rod is the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, and the flower is her Son; a flower white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands; a flower on which the angels desire to look; and, as He declares Himself, the flower of the field.’

* *Super Missus*, ii.

† *De Adventu Dom.*, ii.



The Blessed Virgin is styled 'the Rod of Jesse,' and these words indicate her origin, or genealogy. Our Blessed Lady was of the royal family of David, whose father was Jesse, or Isai. The Messiah descended from the tribe of Juda, and to this tribe David, as well as his father Jesse, belonged. Would it then not have been more dignified to describe our Saviour as springing from the rod of the root of David, than the root of Jesse, since David was the founder of the royal house? David, who was the man after God's heart—David, to whom the promise was made, and whose Son Christ is so often called? Hear the answer of Cornelius a Lapide: 'The prophet says "the root of Jesse," not "of David," to whom the flower was promised; because as the royal house of David sprang from the humble family of Jesse, so the kingdom of God was restored by Christ, the Son of an humble Virgin. Thus God shows His power, in making little things produce great effects. Another reason may be lest Christ should be thought to derive glory from David, whereas He had on the contrary given glory and dignity to this great king.'

It is for the same reason, according to some authors, that the prophet speaks of the *Root*

of Jesse, not of the stem, or trunk. Amongst others, Idiota makes this reflection : ' In the words " the rod springing from the root of Jesse," the deepest humility is contained. The rod is said to come forth, not from the trunk, but from the root, which is hidden in the ground, and in the like manner humility is hidden. Whatever growth the tree has, comes from the root ; and all the excellence of Mary proceeded from her humility, upon which the Lord looked down, as she herself says : " He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid ; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." '

The rod itself, representing the Blessed Virgin, has been described by many authors, even from the earliest times. St. Andrew the Apostle says : ' The rod of Jesse is wholly graceful, entirely straight, not bent, without knot, and without bark.' St. Ambrose proclaims that Mary is a rod in which there was neither the knot of original, nor the bark of actual sin. Paul the Deacon describes her as ' The rod of Jesse, which grew on high by a pure intention ; and being free from the knots of sin, was ever flexible by humility. Hence she was found worthy to produce a flower which has adorned all the fields of the

world.' Idiota says: 'Mary is properly called the rod which came forth from the root of Jesse. For as a rod which springs from the root is higher, straighter, abounds with more sap, is more flexible, more beautiful and green than that which grows on the trunk, so the Blessed Virgin was higher in holiness, straighter in charity, had more of the sap of piety, was more flexible in obedience and humility, more beautiful in purity, and green in fidelity, than all the other Saints.'

In the symbol of the rod of Jesse we also find an excellent argument against the heretics past and present, who deny to our Blessed Lady the title of 'Mother of God.' Nestorius and Eutyches erred in this matter; they were bad theologians. And there are nowadays also ignorant people who say that Mary is not the Mother of God. Now it must be admitted that our Lord Jesus Christ was God and man; and necessarily so, for as man only He could not save us; as God only He could not suffer. Nestorius taught that there were two persons in Christ—the person of the Son of God, and the person of man; and the Blessed Virgin, he said, was the Mother of the person of man which was in Christ, not of the Divine Person. But, as every Christian knows, there is only

one person in Christ, namely, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Consequently, Mary is the Mother of God. Eutyches, in his aversion for Nestorianism, fell into the other extreme, and taught that, as there is only one person in Christ, so there is in Him only one nature, the Divine nature. Here again our Lady's title of Mother of God was at stake; for if Christ has only the Divine, and not the human nature, Mary, who brought Him forth in His quality of Son of man, would not have been truly His Mother. Isaias seems to confute these heresies beforehand, saying: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.' The flower is of the same nature, of the same substance as the rod on which it buds; and, in order to make the fact still clearer, and the truth more evident, he declares that the flower also ascends from the root. The rod and the flower both come from the root; therefore both participate of its substance. The nature of the root, the rod, and the flower is, then, the same; and Christ, without ceasing to be God, which He was from all eternity, also became truly man.

On the words of the Gospel: 'Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps that gave

Thee suck' (Luke xi.), St. Bede writes : ' Great is the faith of the woman who pronounces these words. For whilst the Scribes and Pharisees were tempting our Lord, and blaspheming Him, she acknowledges His Incarnation so sincerely, and confesses it so confidently, that she confutes both the calumny of those who were present, and the perfidy of the heretics who would rise up in after-times. As the Jews then denied that Jesus was the Son of God, so the heretics afterwards denied that He was the Son of man, saying that He had not taken the human nature from the Blessed Virgin Mary. But if the Word was not truly made flesh and born from the Virgin Mary, there is no reason why she should be called Blessed for having borne Him, and given Him suck. Nor could He in truth be called the Son of man, if He had not been thus conceived and born. Mary is then blessed indeed, for she bore a Son Who governs heaven and earth.' All the faithful, therefore, properly proclaim Mary with a unanimous voice the Mother of God, and invoke her as ' Mother of our Creator,' and ' Mother of our Redeemer.'

In the symbol of the rod of Jesse, Mary's office of Mediatrix and Intercessor is also beautifully foreshadowed. The rod stands

between the root and the flower ; Mary intercedes between God and man. The root communicates with the flower only by means of the rod. If we take the root to represent the human race, and the flower Christ, then, if we wish to go to Jesus, we must have recourse to Mary. St. Bernard remarks that 'The woman blessed among women is not out of place in the great work of our reconciliation ; for there is not a better means of communication between us and God than Mary.'

O Blessed Mother of God, we wish to go to Jesus, our only Good, and the Source of all our happiness ! We therefore have recourse to thee, O Rod of Jesse, and we humbly beseech thee that thou wouldst recommend us to the Divine Flower which has sprung from thee, in order that through thee, and in thee, we may be united with thy beloved Son for time and eternity !



XXX.

THE DIAL OF ACHAZ.

*'Salve, horologium, quo retrogradiatur
Sol in decem lineis, Verbum incarnatur.'*

OFFIC. IMMAC. CONC.

'Hail, dial of Achaz! on thee the true sun
Told backward the course which from old he had
run.'

EZECIAS, King of Judà, was sick unto death. Isaias the prophet came, and said to him: 'Thus saith the Lord God: Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die, and not live.' And he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying: 'I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is pleasing before Thee;' and he wept. Isaias had not yet gone out of the court, when the word of the Lord

came to him, saying: 'Go back, and tell Ezechias: Thus saith the Lord the God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer, and I have seen thy tears. Behold I have healed thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the temple of the Lord.' And Ezechias said: 'What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the temple of the Lord the third day?' Isaias replied: 'This shall be the sign from the Lord, that He will do the word which He hath spoken: Wilt thou that the shadow of the sun on the dial go forward ten lines, or that it go back so many degrees?' Ezechias answered: 'It is an easy matter for the shadow to go forward ten lines, and I do not desire that this be done; but let it return back ten degrees.' Then Isaias called upon the Lord; and immediately the shadow went ten degrees backwards by the lines, by which it had already gone down in the sun-dial made by order of Achaz, the father of Ezechias.

The great miracle which God wrought at the request of King Ezechias, when the sun went back ten degrees in the dial of Achaz, is universally admitted to be a figure of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The usual course of the sun is to go forward, and to

make the shadow advance on the sun-dial. Is it not a strange and surprising occurrence then, an event contrary to the ordinary course of nature, to see the shadow go back by the lines, or hours, which it has already shown? But it is a much greater wonder, and a far more astounding fact, that God should go backwards, or humble Himself for our sake. In His Incarnation, the Son of God, the Eternal Sun of justice, went, as it were, backwards, changing the course which He had run from all eternity. He went backwards, for, being God, He became man. Oh, the depth of humiliation! Well may the Apostle exclaim: 'He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man' (Philipp. ii.). And not only did He become man, but He would be a helpless little child, grow up in poverty and contempt, and die the most ignominious death of the Cross. 'In an allegory,' says Cornelius a Lapide, 'the miracle which happened in the dial of Achaz, represented Christ going back ten degrees, that is, descending below the nine choirs of angels in His Incarnation, and even below man in His Passion and Death;' as the Royal Psalmist declares, saying: 'I am a

worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people' (Ps. xxi). 'He humbled Himself,' says St. Paul, 'becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.'

As the sun went back in the dial of Achaz, so the Son of God humbled Himself in the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is therefore very appropriately called the mystical Dial. St. Antonine expresses this opinion, saying: 'Mary is the spiritual Dial of King Achaz, in which the sun went backwards, when God became man.' And alluding to the illness of which Ezechias was cured on the occasion of that wonder, the Saint says: 'In the Blessed Virgin the Sun of justice, the Son of the Most High, went back ten degrees, in order to restore man to health.'

If on one hand the Incarnation is the humiliation of the Son of God, it is on the other the exaltation and glorification of Mary. All the graces and privileges which God lavished upon her, were given her in view of the Incarnation; that is, for the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who wished to become man in her. Oh, what joy, what glory is it for our Blessed Lady, that she was chosen to be the Mother of Jesus! And

since this ineffable dignity was conferred upon her, it is but right that the earth should resound with her praises. The mystical Dial of Achaz has become famous all over the world ; and since the Sun of justice went backwards in her by ten degrees, all generations, as she herself foretold, will call her blessed.

The Mother of God is a Dial with regard to us. What is the office of a dial ? It is to indicate the time. Here on earth, the hours pass for us one after the other with great rapidity. But there is one hour concerning which all good Christians are most solicitous and anxious ; and that is the hour of our conversion, of our salvation. What time is it for our soul ? Are we in God's grace ? Has the hour of reconciliation struck for us ? Shall we persevere in the service of the Lord and in His friendship, to the end ? In what state will the hour of death find us ? If you desire an answer to these questions, look at the mystical Dial. St. Alphonsus assures us, that he who is devout to the Mother of God, either is in the state of grace, or will soon be in it. ' Oh,' exclaims the Saint, ' what evident sign of predestination have the clients of Mary ! It is true that in this life no one can be cer-

tain of his eternal salvation. We know not whether we are worthy of love or hatred. But the blessing of Mary will secure to us the possession of paradise. Devotion to *her* abides in all who are the inheritance of the Lord, that is, all who shall reign in heaven to praise Him for all eternity.'

It has been, and still is, a very general custom to adorn the sun-dials with inscriptions; and these mottoes, as a rule, contain allusions to time. Among the numerous inscriptions that might be used for the decoration of the mystical Dial of Achaz, there is a double text which singularly illustrates its excellence :

'Semper Virgo.'—*'Semper benigna.'*

'Ever a virgin.'—*'Ever kind.'*

Semper Virgo.—This is her glory: Mary, Virgin and Mother. She has the joy of a mother, and the honour of a virgin. Never was there one like unto her before, and there never shall be one after her. It is Mary's privilege: it shall not be given to another. She alone is the Virgin-Mother. The Church often mentions this title in her prayers. In the *Confiteor* we say: 'To Blessed Mary, ever a Virgin.' And in the hymn, *Ave maris stella*, 'Mother of God, and ever a Virgin.'

Semper benigna.—Ever kind, no matter at what time you approach her, no matter at what hour of your life you have recourse to her. Ever kind, no matter who comes, no matter how they come, just or sinners. She is always ready to help us, and even always waiting for us, so desirous she is to bestow blessings upon us at all times. This motto is our consolation. It is this quality of Mary, 'Ever kind,' which made St. Bernard say: 'Remember, O most loving Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard that anyone who had recourse to thy protection, implored thy help, or asked thy intercession, has been abandoned.' And this consideration made him exclaim: 'O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!'

The Blessed Virgin is compared to the sundial, but she far surpasses it. For a dial is only useful during the day, when the sun shines, whereas our Blessed Lady shows the time also at night. She indicated the hour on Calvary, when the Sun of justice had set. She also shows the hour when our soul is enveloped by the darkness and the shadows of suffering and trials. O you who are surrounded by the gloom of affliction, you upon whom the night of discouragement and

despair has descended, lift up your eyes to the mystical Dial! You have a mother yet, a good and tender Mother, who has not forgotten you, and who looks down with kindness upon her suffering child. Take courage, then! Behold, the spiritual Dial already points to the hour when your trials will cease, when peace and happiness will be restored to your heart — the blessed hour of your deliverance.



XXXI.

A U R O R A .

'Quæ est ista, quæ progreditur quasi aurora consurgens?'—CANT. vi.

'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?'

THE earth was plunged in the darkness of night. The human race groped their way in ignorance and sin, and could not extricate themselves from the all-pervading gloom. As time went on, the shadows seemed to deepen around them. Four thousand years had passed since the great fault was committed. What advance had they made in the knowledge of God? The earth was covered with pagans and idolaters, whose gods, if they were not inanimate things, or the works of their own hands, were imaginary heroes, in whom they honoured and worshipped every vice. And among the chosen

ones, among God's own people, the Divine science was indeed contained in the Books of the Law. But how deplorably small was the number of them that kept the Law! How few served God as He had commanded them! Thus, the darkness of night had spread all over the earth, and seemed to increase as time went on. O helpless creature, where is thy wisdom? where is thy power?

Suddenly the heavens brighten on the horizon. Can it be true? Is the morning dawning? Is the long dreary night at last at an end? Yes! The woman foretold four thousand years ago has come; the woman who shall have nothing in common with the enemy; the woman who shall not see the darkness of night; the woman blessed among women, from whom Christ will spring: Mary has appeared in the world.

The Sun of justice was not yet risen; but He already illumined this Aurora. The sun has not yet made his appearance; but he casts his light through unseen spaces. The dawning of the day precedes the sun, yet it is produced by the sun. The Blessed Virgin Mary, that brilliant Aurora, although coming on earth before Christ, derives from Him all her brightness and all her beauty. No grace

comes to man, except from the Saviour. It was in view of the death of the Son of God that Mary was preserved from all stain of sin. It is her Divine Son Who made her a bright, cloudless aurora: 'As the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, shineth in the morning without clouds' (2 Kings xxiii. 4). She rises free from the clouds of sin, from the mist of ignorance. 'As the aurora shining brightly,' says St. Bernard, 'thou didst enter into the world, O Mary, when thou didst precede the splendours of the true Sun with so great a brightness of holiness, that we may truly say that thy charity was worthy to inaugurate the day of salvation, the day of reconciliation, the day which the Lord hath made. Happy aurora, thou wast the messenger of a happy day. It was becoming such a day, to be preceded by such a morning; and thou hast rightly filled the office of aurora. The Sun of justice, Who was to proceed from thee, announcing His coming as by a morning light, cast on thee the abundance of His resplendent rays; and thus illumined, thou didst drive away the gloom of darkness caused by Eve; and thou didst bring into the world the Sun desired by all nations.'*

* Ad gloriosam Virg. Deprecatio.

The aurora, caused by the sun, and yet producing as it were that same sun, is a beautiful figure of our Blessed Lady, whom the Church in her Office addresses, saying: 'Happy art thou, O Blessed Virgin Mary, and most worthy of all praise; for from thee is born the Sun of justice, Christ our God.' But how is it possible for a creature to give birth to the Creator? Do we not lessen the glory of Christ, when we call Him the Son of Mary? No. The Church who teaches us that Mary is the Mother of God, also reminds us of the infinite greatness of Mary's Son, saying: 'He, Whom the whole world cannot contain, has hid Himself in thee, becoming man.' As the aurora is in a manner both the daughter and the mother of the sun, since, being caused by him, she introduces him into the world, so the Blessed Virgin is called both the Daughter and the Mother of God.

'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?' Mary, the mystical aurora, having so happily begun at her origin, also increased in holiness and grace, similar to the dawning of the day. As the aurora by degrees ascends, and gains not only in brightness, but also in elevation, so the Blessed Virgin always

ascending in sanctity, also constantly increased in merits. This agrees with the description given by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs : ' The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day ' (chap. iv. 18). Our Blessed Lady thus progressed in the brightness of holiness and the splendour of virtue as a beautiful aurora, to the great admiration of the angels of heaven, and also leaving an example worthy of our imitation. Our origin has not been like unto hers ; we did not resemble a brilliant and cloudless aurora when we came into the world. But now, having been cleansed and enlightened by the same Sun which shone on Mary, we can augment God's grace in our heart, and advance from virtue to virtue, as the morning rising. Oh, may the light of Divine love, the splendour of God's sanctifying grace, ever shine upon us in the twilight of this life, in order that, following at least at a distance Mary, that most brilliant aurora, we may bring forth Jesus Christ in a spiritual manner in our soul !

As the Blessed Virgin was a mystical aurora at her coming into this world, as her whole life progressed like a morning rising, she is again properly compared to the aurora in her

glorious Assumption. On the commemoration of this great event, the Church repeats the words of the Cantic: 'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?' 'O Virgin most prudent,' she exclaims, 'whither goest thou as the aurora brightly rising?' Mary's death was for her the beginning of a new life; it closed indeed her mortal career, but it was the dawn of a happy day of eternal bliss. Oh, how great must be the splendour of Mary's glory in paradise, if the lustre of her virtues was so great here on earth! In this world she was so near the Sun of justice, she announced His arrival; He dwelt in her; she brought Him forth! In her are fully verified the words of Ecclesiasticus: 'Full of the glory of the Lord is His work' (chap. xlii. 16). If Mary, the work of God by excellence, was made so bright by the rays of the Eternal Sun, when He came to run His mortal course on earth, who shall be able to form an idea of the splendour of that blessed aurora, now that she is illumined by the rays of that Sun in the brightness of the day of eternity! As nothing on earth surpasses the brightness of the aurora, except that of the sun, so there is no glory in heaven above Mary's glory, except that of God. As the aurora is of a golden

colour when it increases in brightness, so the Blessed Virgin is properly described by the Psalmist, saying: 'The queen stood on Thy right hand in gilded clothing.' 'Mary,' as St. Bonaventure remarks, 'enjoys the fulness of the joy of paradise; and she enjoys it most fully; for, as St. Jerome says, she was full of grace, full of God, full of virtue; hence she cannot but fully possess the glory of the everlasting light.'

Hail, brilliant Aurora! Hail, dawn of the day of our Redemption, so long expected, so ardently desired by the Patriarchs and Prophets! O Aurora full of grace, resplendent with the gold of purity! Aurora not only announcing, but bearing the Sun! Aurora driving away the shades of night, and producing the eternal Light! Blessed be thou for ever, for thou hast given us Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls, and the true Light of our hearts! As thou didst announce the end of the long night which had enveloped the earth, and didst drive away the gloom of ignorance and sin, enlighten also, O heavenly Aurora, the darkness of our minds, and drive far from our hearts the shadows of iniquity! May the soft light of thy tender protection always shine upon us! O merciful Aurora,

spread thy mantle of azure and gold over all thy devout children, and guard them with thy unceasing and truly maternal care, until the hour when the day of eternity shall dawn upon us, when by thy assistance and intercession we hope to see the rising of the Sun of justice in the splendour of paradise !

Aurora brightly rising
After the gloom of night ;
O Mary, Jesus' Mother,
Be thou our guiding light !

Here, poor exiles, we wander
Far from our native land ;
Aurora, to our country
Lead us with loving hand !

O glorious Queen of Heaven,
Of mothers thou the best,
Obtain for us, thy clients,
Aurora ever blest,

From thy Beloved Child,
The Sun that setteth not,
A longer day,
A better life,
A happier lot !

THE END.

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